
# Preventing violence through gender equality.

## Gender Equality and Quality of Life Study Austria.

Elli Scambor
Nadja Bergmann
Oliver Bacher-Posch
Lisa Danzer
Ronja Nikolatti
Nicolas Pretterhofer
Jayda Sauseng
Veronika Suppan

Written by:

Elli Scambor, Nadja Bergmann, Oliver Bacher-Posch, Lisa Danzer, Ronja Nikolatti, Nikolas Pretterhofer, Jayda Sauseng, Veronika Suppan.

This study was funded by the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection. The report reflects solely the views of the authors. The Federal Ministry cannot be held responsible for the use of the information contained herein.

Project management and representation of the consortium:

Elli Scambor
Executive Director, Institute for Men's and Gender Studies
www.genderforschung.at
Dietrichsteinplatz 15/8,
8010 Graz, Austria.

Graz/Vienna, June 2025.

Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection
Stubenring 1, 1010 Vienna, Austria.

Source:

Scambor, Elli, Bergmann, Nadja, Bacher-Posch, Oliver, Danzer, Lisa, Nikolatti, Ronja, Pretterhofer, Nicolas, Sauseng, Jayda & Veronika Suppan (2025). Preventing violence through gender equality. Gender Equality and Quality of Life Study Austria. URL: https://vmg-steiermark.at/de/forschung/projekt/geq-gender-equality-and-quality-life [28.08.2025].

## GEQ-AT research team

### Project Coordinators:

Elli Scambor, Institute for Men's and Gender Studies, VMG, Graz, Austria
Nadja Bergmann, L&R Social Research, Vienna, Austria

### VMG Research Team:

Elli Scambor, Oliver Bacher-Posch, Jayda Sauseng, Veronika Suppan

### L&R Research Team:

Nadja Bergmann, Lisa Danzer, Ronja Nikolatti, Nikolas Pretterhofer

## GEQ-AT Advisory Board

The GEQ-AT research team would like to express its sincere thanks to the international scientific advisory board and national stakeholder advisory board for their support in implementing GEQ AT.

### International Scientific Advisory Board:

Marc Gärtner, Federal Forum Men, Germany
Øystein Gullvåg Holter, University of Oslo, Norway
Marta Warat, Jagiellonian University, Poland

### National Stakeholder Advisory Board:

Romeo Bissuti, MEN & DMÖ
Simon Brezina, White Ribbon
Sylvia Bierbaumer, BMASGPK
Eva Burger, AK Vienna
Michaela Gosch, Women's Shelters Styria, OTA
Elisabeth Kerndl, ÖGB
Philipp Leeb, poika Association & DMÖ
Erich Lehner, DMÖ
Katharina Mader, Momentum Institute
Gerhard Meschnigg, White Ribbon
Julia Stroj, ÖGB
Benedikt Trechnitzer, BMASGPK
Manuela Vollmann, ABZ* Austria
Verena Wehmeyer, BKA Women's Section
Karin Zimmermann, Austrian Trade Union Federation

# Table of contents

This report presents the results of the research and practice project "Gender Equality and Quality of Life in Austria" (GEQ-AT), which was carried out between 2023 and 2025. It focuses on the connection between and conditions for a balanced distribution of resources (care work, paid work and decision-making power) and the prevention of violence in the immediate social environment.

Internationally, GEQ-AT builds on previous studies in Norway (2007) and Poland (2015), which showed that egalitarian family structures are associated with a significantly lower likelihood of experiencing violence, especially for children. The Austrian project thus makes an important contribution to the further development of an international research agenda that sees gender equality as the key to non-violence and quality of life.

The report is clearly structured: after a summary of the key findings, the project and its objectives are explained (Chapter 1), followed by a description of the methodological approach (Chapter 2). This is followed by a detailed presentation of the empirical findings: first, attitudes towards gender roles and equality (chapter 3.1), experiences with care work in the family of origin (chapter 3.2) and the current division of paid and unpaid labour, distribution of resources and decision-making processes in partnerships (chapter 3.3) are examined. A central chapter is devoted to the factors influencing gender equality and violence prevention at the individual, relational, organisational and societal levels (Chapter 3.4). This is followed by a presentation of the conditions and forms of violence in the private sphere and mechanisms of non-violence (Chapter 3.5). Finally, the Austrian results are placed in an international comparison with Norway and Poland (Chapter 4), before the report concludes with recommendations, conclusions and an outlook for policy, science and practice.

By combining quantitative and qualitative findings with participatory reflection groups of practitioners and professionals, GEQ-AT creates a comprehensive empirical basis that clearly shows that the more balanced the distribution of resources between the sexes, the lower the risk of violence.

# Summary

## The project and the method

The research and practice project "Gender Equality and Quality of Life in Austria" (GEQ-AT), which was carried out between 2023 and 2025, is the first systematic study to examine the connection between **gender-equitable distribution** of resources – in particular care work, paid work and decision-making power – and **violence prevention in the immediate social environment**. The project is based on the assumption that violence in the private sphere is not only an individual problem, but above all a structural problem that is closely linked to gender relations. GEQ-AT builds conceptually on international precursor studies in Norway (2007) and Poland (2015), which empirically demonstrated that egalitarian family structures are associated with a significantly lower likelihood of experiencing violence, especially for children. Building on this research, a comprehensive, theoretically sound and methodologically diverse study as well as an applied design was developed for the Austrian context.

**The aim** of the project was to identify links between gender inequality, the division of labour within the family, violence and quality of life in order to derive **recommendations for violence prevention and gender equality policy**. In addition to the focus on distributive justice, the concept of "caring masculinities" was also central – i.e. images of masculinity that emphasise care, cooperation and non-violence and consciously deconstruct traditional notions of male dominance. The project thus contributes to the further development of gender equality and violence prevention strategies that see men* not only as part of the problem, but as part of the solution.

GEQ-AT was designed as a mixed-methods study that systematically combines qualitative and quantitative research approaches. The **quantitative survey** is based on a **representative sample of 2,295 people** aged between 18 and 80. The survey was conducted in several languages and aimed to cover as broad a range of socio-demographic groups as possible, with a particular focus on gender, educational attainment, age and migration biographies. The survey focused on questions about role models, experiences of violence and relationships, the division of paid work and care work, decision-making processes and quality of life.

In addition, **63 qualitative interviews** were conducted to analyse biographical experiences with gender relations and violence in greater depth. The qualitative sample provided differentiated insights into family patterns, intergenerational influences, resistance to hegemonic role models and individual scope for action. The study also explored the conditions that enable individuals to emancipate themselves from structures characterised by violence and inequality – or prevent them from doing so. The use of **"matched pairs**" is methodologically innovative: the targeted comparison of two people with similar starting points but different current life contexts (e.g. non-violent versus violent partnerships) enabled precise conclusions about factors that promote or inhibit non-violence and equality.

A third central component was the so-called **"reflection groups**", in which experts from the fields of violence prevention, equality, youth welfare, education and psychosocial practice reflected on initial research results and worked together on their further development and translation into recommendations for action. This feedback from practitioners ensured that the findings of the study were not only empirically valid but also applicable to everyday work in relevant fields of action.

**The combination** of these **three methodological approaches** – representative quantitative surveys, in-depth qualitative interviews and participatory expert discussions – provided a solid empirical basis from which to derive key findings on the links between gender equality, quality of life and violence prevention. The combination of different methodological perspectives made it possible to capture both structural patterns and subjective interpretations and options for action – a prerequisite for not only describing social conditions, but also identifying suggestions for possible changes.

Overall, GEQ-AT clearly shows that **gender equality** has a **preventive effect** when care work, paid work and decision-making power are distributed equally – because the more evenly these resources are distributed in the immediate social environment, the lower the risk of violence. At the heart of this research and practice project is the concept of "**caring masculinities**," which addresses care-oriented models of masculinity as an effective alternative to dominance-based images of masculinity. Practised care not only contributes to reducing violence, but also has a proven positive effect on relationship quality, mental and physical health, and life satisfaction of both partners. The analytical lens of „caring masculinities" links to the international state-of-the-art discourse in men and masculinity studies; its engagement in comparative and applied work contexts makes a meaningful contribution to the field.

The methodological depth and breadth of the study provide a solid **basis for evidence-based policy-making** and **practical interventions**, especially where intersectional disadvantage, unequal distribution of resources and rigid gender roles interact.

## Summary of the most important findings

The results of the GEQ-AT study clearly show that promoting gender equality is a key element of successful violence prevention. Looking at all the chapters together, it becomes clear that traditional gender roles, stereotypical expectations and unequal power relations are closely linked to the risk of violent behaviour – both at the individual and structural levels.

## 1. Gender role attitudes between normative approval and lived ambivalence

An analysis of prevailing attitudes and beliefs regarding gender, equality and the division of labour within the family shows that, despite broad support for equality as a social goal, respondents are caught between **normative openness** and deeply entrenched **heteronormative** and **patriarchal patterns of behaviour**.

## Broad support for equality, but persistent role patterns

The representative survey showed a high level of general support for gender equality: around 70% of respondents fully agree with this goal, and a further 25% tend to agree. This support is significantly higher among women*[1] (76% fully agree) than among men* (64%).

At the same time, the data revealed a considerable persistence **of traditional gender roles**: one third of respondents support a traditional family model with a clear division of labour based on gender. 78% of women*, but 64% of men* strongly agree with the statement "No woman should be financially dependent on a man". Conversely, significantly fewer men* (52%) than women* (71%) disagreed with the statement "A man must be able to assert himself against his wife." Ideas that men* are primarily responsible for the family income and that women* with small children should not work are also more popular among men*. One third of male respondents and just under one fifth of female respondents agreed with the statement "It is the man's job to provide financially for his family". Agreement with traditional role models varied greatly according to age, education and place of residence: older respondents, people with low formal education and people in rural areas were significantly more likely to hold traditional views. For example, 90% of people with tertiary education rejected traditional gender roles, compared with 58% of respondents without a high school diploma. In cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants, the rejection rate was around 80%, compared with 63% in rural areas.

The responses to statements on **gender binary and heteronormative order** are particularly revealing**.** Almost 50% of respondents agreed with the statement "There are only two genders". Women* were significantly more open to non-binary gender concepts than men*. The same applies to statements on the recognition of sexual diversity: over half of women* strongly agreed that children should learn early on to recognise homosexuality as a normal form of sexual orientation – among men*, the approval rating was 17 percentage points lower.

## Attitudes between "doing gender," pragmatism, and critical reflection

The qualitative interviews deepened and differentiated the quantitative findings: they reveal attitudes towards gender roles as normative beliefs, fed by everyday practices, family socialisation and occasional structures. In line with the concept of "*doing gender,*" the interviews make clear that gender order does not appear as a stable given, but is continuously produced, confirmed or even challenged in everyday family practices.

In terms of gender-related attitudes, the qualitative interviews can be condensed into three central patterns of interpretation:

[1] In this report, we use the gender star. This is a special character that serves to ensure linguistic equality for all genders and gender-neutral language. An asterisk is placed between the root of a word or the masculine ending and the feminine ending of a word to indicate space for additional genders, e.g. student*s (cf. Freie Universität Berlin 2022). We also use the * to emphasis the constructed nature of gender, as not every person who is considered a boy* or man*, girl* or woman* would describe themselves as such.

- **Affirmative reproduction of traditional gender relations:**
  In this interpretation pattern, traditional role attributions – such as the man as the main breadwinner and the woman as the primary caregiver – were not only perceived as biographically familiar, but also as self-evident and normatively correct. These attitudes were often based on naturalising arguments ("women are better at dealing with children", "men are less emotional") and stabilised existing inequalities without explicitly questioning them. In this context, male care work appeared – if at all – as a supportive gesture, but not as an equal responsibility. This view points to the continuing effectiveness of hegemonic notions of masculinity and gender-coded expectations that are deeply entrenched in society.
- **Pragmatic and flexible arrangements:**
  A second pattern of interpretation describes an attitude that affirms equality but is strongly adapted to situational factors in its practical implementation. Here, the organisation of paid work and care work is dominated by considerations of practicality, financial, individual resilience or personal preference. Decisions on the division of labour are made adaptively – for example, based on who currently earns more or who is subjectively "better suited" – but usually within existing structural inequalities. Narratives in this pattern did not fundamentally question gender-specific roles but rather moved in an intermediate field between normative openness and reality-based adaptation. Equality appeared here less as a social demand than as a matter of private negotiation.
- **Egalitarian, critically reflective models:**
  The third pattern of interpretation is characterised by a conscious examination of gender norms and a strong sense of justice. The interviewees in this spectrum critically examined traditional role models, reflected on their own influences and actively demanded a new distribution of paid work and care work based on partnership. These attitudes were often accompanied by a rejection of binary gender attributions, a high sensitivity to structural barriers and a political dimension of equality. Masculinity was not seen here as the opposite of care, but was redefined through responsibility, emotionality and relationship skills – in line with the concept of "*caring masculinities*". In this model, equality was not a narrative of renunciation, but an emancipatory goal – both individually and socially.

A central theme in many interviews was the economic dimension of gender relations. The gender pay gap was not only perceived as an abstract statistic, but as a structuring force in everyday life: **those who earn less stay at home** – and these are mostly women. This shows that economic inequality is not only a downstream effect, but also a cause of gender asymmetry in the division of labour and decision-making power.

**Same-sex and queer parenthood** were discussed – if mentioned at all in the interviews – as exceptions or in connection with institutional barriers. The prevailing mindset remains the heteronormative "two-parent model". This gap points to the continuing structural invisibility of gender and family diversity in discourse and everyday life.

### Normative change with structural obstacles

The findings on gender role attitudes and equality reveal a society in transition – with considerable potential for reform, but also significant resistance. While explicit **support for equality** is **high**, **traditional role patterns** and **heteronormative models continue to shape everyday practices**. Agreement with progressive statements is often not synonymous with equality in practice.

Deeply rooted and at the same time contradictory social models of gender and equality have their **origins** in the **family practices of the family of origin**. The way in which care and paid work were experienced in childhood not only implicitly shapes perceptions of normality and justice but also forms a central basis for adult gender role orientations. The reproduction of gender-hierarchical responsibilities is thus internalised at an early age through biographical experiences, symbolic orders and everyday observations – a circumstance that is empirically documented in the quantitative and qualitative data of the GEQ-AT study.

## 2. Gender relations in the family of origin – care work as a formative experience

The analysis of the division of labour in the family of origin provides key insights into the early socialisation of gender and the reproduction of inequalities. The distribution of care and paid work during the childhood of the respondents was predominantly strongly gender-specific – with far-reaching consequences for current attitudes and patterns of behaviour.

### Female responsibility for care as the norm

The representative survey data clearly showed that care work in the **families of origin** of the respondents (persons aged 18 and over) was performed by women* in a clear majority of cases. In almost two-thirds of cases (65%), the mother was solely or predominantly responsible for care work, while the father was named as the primary caregiver in only around 7% of cases. Only 21% of respondents reported an equal division of care work between the parents.

It is also clear that this traditional division of roles has hardly changed over generations, neither between age groups nor significantly according to education or place of residence. The image of a caring mother and a working father thus represented a central **collective pattern of interpretation** that shaped the respondents' memories and experiences of family normality. This gender-stereotypical division of labour remained dominant even when mothers were employed, indicating a high double burden on women in these families.

One particularly significant finding was **that** the **more unequally care work** was distributed in the **family of origin**, **the more likely** respondents were to hold **traditional attitudes towards gender roles today.** This underlines the formative influence of the division of labour within the family of origin on the development of gender-specific attitudes in adulthood.

## Everyday practice, visibility and symbolic order

The interviews deepened these findings and reveal patterns of interpretation based on experience. Looking back, the respondents almost universally described their mothers as the central figure in their everyday lives – responsible for emotional support, organising daily life and meeting their children's needs. The father, on the other hand, was often described as "absent" or "not responsible" – either spatially (e.g. due to long working hours or separation) or functionally (e.g. due to distance from care practices).

In many narratives, **fathers' involvement** in care work was limited to **occasional** activities such as picking up children from nursery, doing odd jobs or organising leisure activities. In many cases, these activities are remembered as significant and clearly distinguished from everyday care responsibilities. The **exaggerated memories of episodic paternal presence** contrast with the invisible, ongoing work of women. Here, power is not manifested in the direct devaluation of female care work, but in its implicit devaluation through male absence, accompanied by the valorisation of exceptional acts performed by men. Fathers who take on care tasks on an ad hoc basis often see themselves as modern and progressive – even though the basic distribution of burdens remains unchanged. These constellations are an expression of a gender-hierarchical discourse that devalues female care work by marking it as self-evident and male care work as special.

At the same time, the interviews also revealed ambivalence and reflection processes: some respondents expressed regret about the emotional distance of their fathers or the excessive demands placed on their mothers. Individual men reported that, looking back, they experienced their fathers' limited presence in their childhood as a loss and are therefore now actively trying to structure responsibility differently in their own families. Such statements mark the transition from unreflective reproduction to a critical questioning of habituative role patterns – in the sense of a biographical learning process.

## Intergenerational influence and structural persistence

The results illustrate that the traditional gender-specific division of care and paid work in the family of origin is a central pattern of socialisation that has long-term effects. The interviews showed how these experiences are implicitly embedded in today's ideas of responsibility, role behaviour and normative attitudes – among all genders. At the same time, individual cases revealed that these patterns can be questioned and transformed – for example, through conscious differentiation, emotional re-evaluation or political awareness.

For gender equality policy and violence prevention, this means that **family care relationships** must be understood **not only as individual decisions, but** as **a structuring space for socialisation**. Those who grow up in an environment where care is associated with women and male absence is normalised often adopt this gendered order as an implicit basis for their own actions. Conversely, the experience of shared care work can represent a resource capital that contributes to egalitarian orientations in adult life.

## 3. Partnership today: division of labour, decisions and resources

### Care work – persistence of traditional patterns despite the ideal of equality

An analysis of the current division of labour in partnerships also revealed a fundamental ambivalence between the normative ideal of equal division of tasks and everyday practice, which in many cases remains characterised by gender-specific inequality. While equality is widely recognised as a social value, the concrete organisation of household and care work reveals considerable asymmetry, which is particularly detrimental to women.

#### Women* continue to do the majority of unpaid work

The results of the representative survey clearly show that women* continue to take on the majority of everyday household tasks – such as laundry, shopping, cooking, and cleaning – while men* tend to focus on activities such as repairs or gardening. Only 16% of respondents reported an equal distribution of household tasks. The difference in perception is also striking: While 75% of women* said they (tend to) do the housework themselves, 62% of men* said that these tasks are (tend to) be done by their partner. This gap points to a **double invisibility of female care work** – it is not only distributed unequally in reality but also underestimated by male respondents.

The **birth of the first child** represents a particularly massive change in the division of tasks. While 25% of childless couples still reported an equal distribution of housework, this proportion drops to 14% among parents. The classic pattern – men* increase or maintain their paid work, while women* reduce it and take on the majority of care work – thus prevails at the latest after the transition to parenthood. Childcare and child-rearing activities also continue to be associated with women*: women* were significantly more likely to take care of daily tasks (e.g., preparing meals, changing nappies), caring for sick children, and play and leisure activities. Educational activities such as setting boundaries for children or reprimanding them verbally are also predominantly their responsibility. However, male respondents were slightly more likely to consider the latter as tasks that they tend to do themselves (16%) or mainly do themselves (14%),or do together with their partner. Overall, men* were more likely to consider the distribution of these tasks to be equal, while women* were more likely to perceive the distribution as unequal.

Significant differences along socio-economic lines were also apparent. In urban areas, the division of tasks tended to be more egalitarian than in rural areas. For example, 24% of couples living in large cities said they share childcare tasks equally, while this figure is only 10% in medium-sized cities and rural communities. The **rural-urban difference** is particularly pronounced in terms of gender: 81% of women* in rural areas (tend to) take on childcare alone, while this figure was 58% in large cities. The pattern is reversed for men: 40% of men in large cities said they (tend to) take on these tasks themselves, compared with only 14% in rural areas. **Educational attainment** also has an influence: the higher the level of education, the more likely it is that tasks are shared equally. Respondents with tertiary qualifications – regardless of gender – were most likely to show egalitarian patterns.

### The role of women* in care work: differentiating positions and practices in the tension between normative orders and subjective negotiations

The interviews illustrated that women* take on very different roles in family care work. These can be summarised in recurring patterns of interpretation that reveal both continuity and change in gender-specific division of labour:

- **Natural caregivers** – Women* take on care work as a "natural" task, often without consciously questioning it. This self-evidence stabilises traditional gender orders, but is not always experienced as fulfilling in itself, so that many seek parallel spaces for self-realisation.
- **Shapers of lived equality** – Women* who organise care tasks in partnership and consciously on an equal footing. This requires structural enablers (e.g. flexible working hours) and egalitarian attitudes on the part of both partners.
- **Primary responsibility with selective support** – women* bear the brunt of practical and mental care work, while partners provide selective support, usually on request. Structural inequality remains.
- **Pioneers of shared responsibility** – Women* who actively work towards a more equal distribution by guiding and sensitising their partners and encouraging them to take on responsibility. This has the potential to bring about change, but at the same time, increases their own mental load.
- **Mistrust-based primary responsibility** – Women* who find it difficult or impossible to delegate care tasks due to mistrust of male care practices that have grown out of their biography or experience.

These patterns show that care work is not a uniform experience, but a complex web of habitualised role expectations, partnership-based negotiation, biographical influences, and structural conditions.

This picture is complemented by the role of generational caregivers – especially mothers and mothers-in-law – who are effective as care networks but also as bearers of traditional role models. Their influence varies according to their level of education, social situation, migration history, and place of residence. In many cases, they provide practical help to ensure that work and family life are compatible, while at the same time acting as a normative authority that can counteract young women's efforts to achieve equality. Conflicts over role expectations are generational, milieu-specific and culturally coded, and make it clear that care work is not only a contemporary phenomenon, but also an intergenerational arena for negotiating gender relations.

### Masculinities in care work: differentiating current forms of participation between reproduction, reflection and transformation

Qualitative analysis of male participation in care work revealed a complex picture: constructions of masculinity in care work are by no means homogeneous, but oscillated between the

reproduction of traditional patterns, reflexive negotiation, and transformative practice. Four central types of participation can be identified:

The interviews showed that male care work can take very different forms – from breaking with traditional role models to symbolic participation without lasting change. Four central patterns of interpretation emerge:

1. **Caring Masculinities** – Men* took on care work on an equal footing, shared responsibility for household chores, childcare and mental load, and understood care as part of male identity. These arrangements were often based on structural resources (flexible working hours, economic security) and a conscious departure from hegemonic norms of masculinity. *They have the potential to be transformative, as they establish equality as a natural part of male life practices.*
2. **Helping masculinities** – Men* participated in care tasks on an ad hoc basis but remained outside the primary sphere of responsibility. The main responsibility for organisation and planning lies with the female partner; male participation is usually "on demand". *This pattern provides short-term relief but stabilises traditional power and responsibility asymmetries in the long term.*
3. **Podium masculinity** – men* took on temporary care roles that are presented as exceptional (e.g. parental leave, paternity leave) and highlighted as a contribution to gender equality, without any lasting change to the structural division of labour. Equality appears here as a symbolic gesture, while traditional responsibilities remain in place. *They create a narrative of modernity that rhetorically obscures real inequalities.*
4. **Hybrid models** – Men* took on substantial care responsibilities depending on their stage of life, employment situation and individual arrangements, without necessarily referring to a normative model such as Caring Masculinities. Responsibilities were distributed flexibly and according to need, often based on individual skills and preferences. *These models open up scope for change but remain vulnerable to a return to traditional patterns when external conditions deteriorate.*

Male care practices ranged from the reproduction of traditional roles to pragmatic adaptation and conscious transformation. Their form depended heavily on structural conditions, biographical socialisation and negotiation processes within partnerships. Care work thus proves to be a central field in which masculinity is renegotiated – or anchored in the familiar.

### Equality remains structurally blocked – care remains female, masculinity "non-caring"

In summary, despite egalitarian convictions and a broad social consensus on equality in partnerships, a deep gap remains between aspiration and everyday practice. Care work remains predominantly female, with all the structural, social, and health consequences for women*. This inequality is stabilised by culturally entrenched role expectations, economic incentives and a lack of structural alternatives – non-caring masculinity norms remain largely untouched.

### Division of paid work and economic resources

The GEQ-AT study clearly highlights gender-specific differences in the distribution of paid work and economic resources. The findings are consistent with existing statistics. Although men* and women* in the study hardly differed in terms of overall labour force participation, they did differ in terms of the amount of work they do: men* were significantly more likely to work full-time, while women* were disproportionately represented in the 21 to 30 hours per week category. More than half of men* said they do more paid work than their partner; conversely, the majority of women* reported that their partner does more paid work than they do. Only a third of respondents felt that paid work is equally distributed within their partnership, and only 8% of women* said they do more paid work themselves.

These differences were also reflected in income: while women's hourly earnings in Austria are currently 19% lower than those of men on average – a gender pay gap that is well above the EU average – more than two-thirds of women surveyed said that their partner has (significantly) more money at their disposal. Conversely, this was only true for 17% of the men surveyed. A comparable income level within the partnership was reported by just under 23% of the women surveyed and around 29% of the men surveyed.

These disparities were not purely individual phenomena, but rather a reflection of structural employment relationships and family role divisions. The unequal distribution of paid work not only leads to unequal incomes in the here and now, but also has long-term consequences for social security, retirement provision and decision-making power within partnerships. It therefore represents a key obstacle to achieving true economic equality.

### Decision

Decision-making processes within families and couples are a central area of gender-related power relations. They not only shape the everyday organisation of living together, but also have a profound impact on self-perceptions, role expectations, and social positioning. The analysis of the GEQ-AT study shows that who has the "final say" in the family is not merely an organisational question – it is about symbolic order and subjective self-efficacy.

The quantitative results confirmed a seemingly balanced decision-making structure: around 59% of respondents said they make decisions together. A further 13% reported varying decision-making practices. Nevertheless, just under a third showed a clear asymmetry, with women* having the final say more often than men* – a finding that must be viewed in a differentiated manner. This is because the qualitative analysis clearly showed that **female decision-making power** is **often linked to legitimation**, such as special skills or functional necessities. Male decision-making power, on the other hand, appears in many cases to be taken for granted and culturally legitimised.

The extent to which there is a connection between the decision-making behaviour of parents and that in one's own partnership is not clear. Among male respondents, no connection between current decision-making behaviour in the partnership and that in the family of origin could be established. Among **female respondents**, however, it appears that **joint decision-**

**making behaviour in the partnership** is more common **when** this was **also** the case **in the family of origin**.

Looking at decision-making patterns in the family of origin, three dominant types of family decision-making practices emerge, based on the Olson (2000) model, which are legitimised and experienced differently by gender:

**Rigid, hierarchical systems – male-dominated decision-making structures**. In numerous interviews, families of origin are described as highly hierarchical: decision-making power was mostly held by fathers or grandfathers as a matter of course. These "rigid systems" are characterised by low flexibility and hardly any participatory communication. The authority of male family members was not justified but accepted as a natural order – an expression of deeply rooted patriarchal norms. Female voices remained marginal or tied to specific roles in these constellations. Cohesion often appeared functional, but asymmetrical – a power imbalance that was rarely questioned.

**Female decision-making power requires legitimation – power through exception, not through equality**. Where women* did have decision-making power, it was usually linked to external or biographical conditions – such as language skills, a driving licence, home ownership, or the absence of the father. In these cases, female authority was experienced as a deviation from the male-connoted "norm" and required special justification. The symbolic order remains intact: women* are allowed to decide because they have to, not because they are equal actors. The power relations appear to have shifted but not transformed – the system remains asymmetrical in its basic features.

**Democratic, flexible decision-making patterns – participation according to impact**. In a third type, decision-making was described as a dynamic, participatory process. Decisions are based on involvement and expertise, not on gender or authority. The "family council" is a form of joint negotiation that is institutionalised in some families, a democratic culture of communication in which all participants are recognised as capable of acting. Decision-making power is shared, not delegated. These "balanced systems" in Olson's (2000) sense combine moderate cohesion and flexibility with high-quality communication. What is particularly striking is that these constellations promote not only equality, but also individual self-efficacy and family resilience.

The qualitative analysis shows how deeply family-structured decision-making patterns are interwoven with social gender norms. While **male decision-making power usually** remained **unquestioned**, **female authority** appeared **to require explanation**. Democratic and reflective patterns proved to be conducive to social and individual development – but they depend on structural framework conditions and communicative skills. Decision-making relationships in families thus reflected not only private dynamics but also social power relations – and they have a lasting impact on how gender equality is lived in everyday life.

## "Who works, who cares – and who decides?" Division of labour, resources and equality in partnerships

The GEQ-AT results show that gender-related inequalities in the distribution of work cannot be viewed in isolation, but are closely linked to socio-economic factors, normative models and family socialisation patterns.

### *Paid work and care division: structured inequalities*

The results of the GEQ-AT study make it clear that paid and unpaid work are closely linked and that this link is strongly gender-specific. Among parents with young children, significantly fewer women (74%) than men (94%) were in paid employment, while there is hardly any difference between those with and without children. The main reason for part-time work among women* were care responsibilities (40%), whereas this was rarely the case for men* (7%). This unequal participation in the labour market has direct economic consequences: women* bear the so-called motherhood penalty – income and career disadvantages due to care work – while men* without active care responsibilities often enjoy a fatherhood bonus. Even when they work similar hours, women* disproportionately took on unpaid housework and care work – even when they work more than their partners. Conversely, men* were more likely to share tasks equally when their partners work longer hours. Care work is even more unevenly distributed than housework: only 7% of women* and 17% of men* reported an equal distribution. Men* were most likely to share care when they themselves work less, while women* were most likely to do so when they work more than their partners.

### *Economic resources and decision-making dynamics*

There was also a significant correlation between economic equality in partnerships and the distribution of unpaid work. Men* who were in financially balanced relationships were more likely to experience an equal distribution of housework. The study also shows that egalitarian decision-making processes – such as having a joint "final say" – correlated with a more balanced distribution of tasks. Conversely, when decision-making power is unequal, the distribution of care work was also more often asymmetrical. These findings illustrate that equality in terms of resources and decision-making processes plays a key role in ensuring a fair distribution of unpaid work.

### *Attitudes, caring behaviour, and interaction effects*

Another finding is that the interplay of attitudes, self-images and relational perceptions is important. Couples in which both partners perceived each other as equally caring most often reported an equal division of housework and care work. Conversely, when there is an unequal perception of willingness to provide care, the division of labour was also more uneven. However, attitudes do not have a linear effect: although there was a clear correlation between egalitarian beliefs and the egalitarian division of housework, in the case of care work, even people with traditional role perceptions occasionally reported a balance – an indication of context-specific effects.

## Factors influencing a balanced distribution of resources

A gender-equitable distribution of paid work, care work, and decision-making power does not arise by chance, but is based on the interaction of conducive factors at four interrelated levels: the individual level (onto), the level of social relationships (micro), the organisational and institutional level (meso) and the socio-structural level (macro). Based on the findings from the interviews, various factors can be identified that promote a balanced distribution in partnerships.

### Factors at the individual level (onto)

The individual sphere proved to be central to the equal distribution of paid work, care work and decision-making power. Qualitative analysis showed that it is not so much individual characteristics as an ensemble of attitudes, skills and reflective processes that enabled people to question traditional role patterns and shape more equitable models of living.

- A key factor was a **progressive attitude towards gender roles**, which enabled individuals to critically reflect on stereotypical divisions of labour and actively implement alternative models. In some cases, gender equality actions could only emerge **as a result of specific life circumstances** (e.g. illness, parental leave, unemployment), which shows that the development of progressive attitudes is **a process**.
- Closely linked to this was the **ability to understand different points of view** – in other words, the willingness to empathise with other people's realities. This ability opened up a deeper understanding of mental burdens, emotional work, and structural inequalities – and acted as a driving force for fair negotiation processes in both couple relationships and organisations.
- **Life situations with particular challenges** (e.g. illness) can also act as a "window of opportunity" if they disrupt familiar responsibilities and allow new responsibilities to be experienced, such as for men in care work. Such experiences can trigger long-term changes in perspective.
- Other key factors were **care orientation** and the attitude that **fulfilment in life** is **not defined exclusively by paid work**. Those who viewed relationship work as equivalent to paid work were more likely to take on care responsibilities actively, without perceiving it as a loss of personal or social status. This attitude enabled men* to develop ways of living that are free from restrictive hegemonic norms of masculinity.
- **Practical ways of self-reflection** were also important: reading, writing and creative forms of expression helped people to question social expectations, recognise personal boundaries and redefine their scope for action. Reflection enabled people to recognise cognitive dissonance between their own beliefs and their actual behaviour – and to change it if necessary.
- The **transgenerational transmission of feminist values** also plays a formative role: those who were taught from an early age that financial independence, shared

responsibility and equality are essential were more likely to make independent and fair decisions in their own lives – both in their career and family planning.

### Factors at the level of social relationships (micro)

At the micro level – i.e., in direct social relationships, especially in couple relationships and family networks – it is largely determined whether and how resources such as paid work, care work, and decision-making power are divided. Qualitative analysis showed that conscious negotiation processes, relationship quality, social support and emotional openness on the part of both partners were key influencing factors.

- A stable influencing factor was a **functioning informal care network**, for example through grandparents, relatives, neighbours and/or friends. Such networks not only enabled women to enter the labour market earlier and in greater numbers, but also provided emotional relief and organisational flexibility. At the same time, however, it was also evident that external help does not automatically lead to greater equality – for example, when care work is compensated by third parties instead of being redistributed between partners.
- **Conscious planning and negotiation of care work** was also crucial **– ideally before the birth of a child**. In cases where the division of labour has been proactively agreed upon, significantly more equal structures emerged. In the absence of such prior clarification, traditional role patterns often reproduced themselves, with the result that women* "slipped" into primary responsibility while men* remain focused on gainful employment.
- The existence of **a "brave space**" – a protected environment for openness, vulnerability and equal negotiation – was also crucial. Where emotions and needs can be communicated openly, traditional role expectations can be questioned and individual solutions found. This not only promoted the fair distribution of tasks, but also emotional equality in the relationship.
- Another powerful factor was **actively nurturing relationships** ("care for relationships"): when couples regularly set aside time for each other, make emotional burdens visible, and showed appreciation for one another, this created space for shared responsibility – even beyond the role of parent.
- In everyday life, **mutual support, flexible role distribution and open communication** were the cornerstones of gender-equitable division of labour. Couples who consciously rejected rigid ideas about "men's and women's tasks", respected personal boundaries and negotiated their routines together, shaped their everyday lives more equitably – and created conditions in which care work is shared, paid work is adapted and decision-making power is exercised jointly.

### Factors at the level of organisations and networks (meso)

At the meso level – i.e. in organisations, work contexts, local networks and educational institutions – the everyday lives of couples and families are structurally shaped. Qualitative analysis illustrated the importance of this context as one where conditions that enable an equal division of paid work and care work are created (or prevented). A few key factors stand out:

- The narratives repeatedly referred to **community projects** that promote equality by embedding care work in society and enabling collective responsibility. Neighbourhood childcare, exchange platforms, and communally organised spaces not only provide concrete relief, but can also support new role models – such as men who actively take on care tasks. In addition, they open up low-threshold spaces for social and political participation.
- **Caring companies** – i.e. work environments designed with care – act as important drivers of equality. Participants here mentioned flexible working time models, home office, part-time options for all genders and a culture of appreciation for parental responsibility as enabling men* to participate more actively in care work, as well as enabling women* to pursue their professional ambitions. Companies that do not dismiss care as a private matter but support it institutionally contribute to cultural change in the long term.
- **Raising awareness through education** forms the basis for gender equality awareness. Best practise comes from schools, universities, and adult education institutions that actively question stereotypical role models, integrate feminist content, and open up learning spaces for all genders promote reflective attitudes and decision-making skills. At the same time, the analysis showed that where educational institutions remained traditional – for example, in gender-stereotypical subject choices or implicit language – traditional role patterns were reinforced. Education, therefore, only promotes equality if role patterns are consciously reflected upon and education is explicitly geared towards equality.
- **Professional counselling services** – whether psychosocial, legal, or career-related – are important places for self-empowerment. They helped to identify gender-based role patterns, develop individual strategies for the distribution of care and work, and negotiate conflicts in relationships or at work. Counselling not only supports individuals, but also has a structural impact – for example, through cooperation with companies, educational institutions or political decision-makers.
- **Networks for gender equality** create collective spaces for exchange, encouragement, and visibility. Women*'s networks strengthen professional careers, fathers' groups promote care engagement, and queer networks enable gender-diverse perspectives on care relationships. These structures normalise diverse lifestyles and contribute to the long-term transformation of gender roles.

### Impact factors at the structural level (macro)

The macro level – i.e. in legal, economic and political structures – bears key levers for a more equitable distribution of resources such as time, money and decision-making power between the sexes. The qualitative interviews show that equality does not depend solely on individual will or negotiations within partnerships but is largely determined by social conditions.

- **Needs-based, formal childcare** is a key factor. If childcare facilities with flexible opening hours and sufficient capacity are available, parents could take up or expand their employment without compromising the quality of childcare. Conversely, inadequate provision – such as half-day places without extended hours – led to a return to traditional family roles, as the burden of organisation and care continued to fall primarily on women. Well-developed childcare has a double effect: it provides concrete relief for families and, in the long term, changes social- e role expectations by making it clear that care is not something that has to be provided solely within the private sphere of the family.
- **Low- or no-income differences** between partners strengthen the scope for decision-making in favour of a partnership-based division of paid work and care work. If the male partner's income is significantly higher, it seems financially "logical" for him to remain in full-time employment while the woman works part-time. This mechanism results in dependency, limited pension provision, and fewer opportunities for advancement. Income equality, on the other hand, **increases the bargaining power of both partners** and enables genuine freedom of choice – both in childcare and career decisions.
- **Labour market dynamics** can either reinforce existing gender relations or break them down. Rising **demand in the labour market**, for example, due to a shortage of skilled workers, is forcing companies to improve working conditions – for example, in the health and education sectors. Higher wages and better working conditions lead to care professions being valued more highly by society and appear more attractive to men. At the same time, labour shortages make it easier **for underrepresented groups** to enter previously segregated occupational fields, which in turn undermines stereotypical role assignments.
- **Retirement** can act as a window of opportunity to break down entrenched role divisions later in life. Many men who defined themselves strongly as breadwinners during their working lives experienced new opportunities for care work in retirement, for example looking after grandchildren, caring for relatives or doing household chores. This late reorientation enabled new family closeness, intergenerational care and reflection on one's own role as a father. Although this usually happens retrospectively, it contributes to **changing cultural norms** by making care visible and legitimate in men's lives as well. Additionally, it can contribute to more progressive care arrangements in the families of origin that shape future generations.

- **Political framework conditions and legal regulations** are fundamental structural factors. The **legitimacy of diverse family models** – including legal legitimacy – creates the conditions necessary to ensure that diversity in practice does not lead to insecurity or discrimination. Legal regulations on parental leave are equally important. Current parental leave systems often favour a traditional model (long leave for mothers, early return to work for fathers). **"Use-it-or-lose-it" models,** in which both parents must take a mandatory share of parental leave, **promote gender equality**, as internationally successful examples show. This allows individual gender equality aspirations to be **structurally supported and legitimised**.

## 4. Violence

The GEQ-AT results showed that **violence is a multifaceted phenomenon** that often takes place behind closed doors and within complex relationship constellations. Psychological violence is the most widespread form, while physical and sexual violence are less common but have a profound impact. The fact that **current violence and perpetration are rarely discussed** makes it clear that violence remains a **social taboo**. Violence is often not recognised or acknowledged, not named – and thus remains hidden and intangible even for support systems. This underscores the need for **awareness, low-threshold services, and structural support** to identify violence in partnerships at an early stage and counter it effectively.

### Forms of violence and patterns of violence in relationships

- The majority of respondents reported that they had **not** experienced **violence** in their (current or last) relationship in the last 12 months (87% of women*, 85% of men*). When violence did occur, it **was most often psychological violence** (11%), such as verbal abuse, humiliation, blackmail or controlling behaviour.
- **Social violence** (e.g. contact bans, control of personal belongings) occurred in 3% of women* and 6% of men*. **Material, physical and sexual violence** were less common (less than 3% in each case) – but included serious forms such as coercion into sexual acts or financial control.
- It is striking that **no significant differences** were found along the lines of age, education or place of residence – violence affects all socio-demographic groups.

### Dealing with violence and support strategies

- Around **half of those affected did not actively respond** to experiences of violence. Only 14% sought help – mostly within their private sphere (family, friends), less often from the police, women's shelters or professional counselling centres. This points to **structural and intrapersonal barriers** in accessing support services.

- Similarly to experiences of violence in relationships, victims often did not respond to **violence** perpetrated by their partners – 46% of respondents reported it. Only in 9% of cases did the partner seek professional support.

### Perpetration of violence

- 7% of women* and 8% of men* surveyed stated that they had committed violence themselves in the last 12 months – again with no significant differences between various socio-demographic groups.

### Chain reaction of multiple forms of violence

- Qualitative interviews revealed that violence often did **not** occur **in a single form**, but **in a combination of several forms** – such as psychological and physical violence in escalating relationship conflicts.

## Trivialisation, normalisation, and legitimisation of violence

The interviews made clear that violence is often not identified or recognised as such because it is retrospectively legitimised, emotionally diffused, or morally justified.

Respondents typically find it easier to talk about past violence than current violence. Current experiences of violence are often only discussed hesitantly or after repeated questioning. Assaults are not always recognised or identified as violence – especially in relation to physical punishment in childhood or emotional manipulation in relationships.

These well-documented mechanisms of trivialisation and normalisation make it difficult to clearly identify violence and prevent people from consciously addressing their experiences of violence. They also show how deeply social acceptance and repression of violence are rooted in biographical narratives – and that prevention must also involve questioning and changing society's interpretation of violence.

The trivialisation or legitimisation of violence is evident in various narrative strategies:

- **Trivialisation through temporal and cultural relativisation:** Violence in childhood was often portrayed as "normal" for a certain period of time. Statements such as "Those were different times" or "It wasn't a big deal back then" suggested that violence was not recognised as such, but is perceived as a historically legitimate means of education. By embedding it in a context that accepts violence, the perpetrator downplayed their own involvement.
- **Emotional framing:** Acts of violence were sometimes described humorously or as harmless, for example when respondents talked about being chased with a slipper as being "rather relaxed". The threat or actual violence was thus reinterpreted as playful or insignificant, obscuring its problematic dimension.
- **Legitimation through moral self-blame:** In some cases, violence was portrayed as a justified sanction; those who are "cheeky" deserve a "slap". This argument legitimises

violence as a necessary response to misconduct and shifts responsibility away from the perpetrators to the victims.

- **Normalisation through positive framing:** Violence is sometimes embedded in a narrative that emphasises other positive aspects of living together. For example, a childhood is described as "actually nice" and "well cared for" despite violence in the immediate social environment. Violence thus appears as a minor aspect of an otherwise intact family situation.
- **Invisibility of structural and intrapersonal violence:** While many narratives refered to interpersonal violence (without naming it as such), structural violence (e.g. through poverty, exclusion, inequality) remains largely invisible. Intrapersonal violence (e.g. self-deprecation) was also rarely identified as such. The evaluation shows that visible and direct actions are described, while subtle, systemically embedded forms of violence remain hidden.

## Conditions for violence and non-violence in partnerships

### Conditions at the individual level (onto)

At this point, individual life stories, attitudes and skills that promote or counteract violence in partnerships are examined at the onto level. The qualitative and quantitative data from the GEQ-AT study clearly show that biographical experiences, personal resources, and individual reflection and action skills are key influencing factors.

- **Biographical influences through experiences of violence in childhood:** A key finding was the link between experiences of violence in childhood and subsequent violence in intimate relationships. In particular, witnessing or experiencing violence in the family of origin increased the risk of experiencing or perpetrating violence in the current relationship. The proportion of violent relationships among those who witnessed violence in childhood or were themselves affected was around 20%. Conversely, those who did not experience violence in childhood were significantly less likely to be affected by intimate partner violence. However, the interviews suggested that a violent childhood did not necessarily lead to violence in adult life – it could also contribute to a conscious rejection of violence.
- **Resilience and self-efficacy:** The ability to process difficult biographical experiences and actively take a stand against violence was described in many interviews. This inner strength, which may stem from reflection of childhood experiences, helped those affected to break free from violent relationships. Closely linked to this is the concept of self-efficacy – i.e. confidence in one's own ability to shape one's life and conflicts actively and non-violently. Self-efficacy is often established in childhood, for example through parental encouragement of independence and personal responsibility. In adult relationships, it manifests itself, among other things, in the active decision to leave an intolerable partnership.

- **Violence prevention through reflection and setting boundaries:** Another preventive factor is the ability to critically examine past experiences of violence and consciously reject them. Many interviewees actively distanced themselves from traditional patterns of violence or punishment, for example from their own childhood. This attitude is partly supported by professional experience in victim protection and partly by individual reflection. The conscious decision to "do things differently" is central to forming non-violent relationships.
- **Equality as an attitude:** The interviews show that equality, respect, and mutual recognition are understood as cornerstones of non-violent partnerships. Particular emphasis was placed on the rejection of patriarchal claims to authority – often in awareness of family influences and in the desire not to pass these on to one's own children.
- **Social and communication skills:** Key prerequisites for non-violence are communication skills such as willingness to compromise, ability to accept criticism, emotional control, and conflict resolution skills. Respondents who reported shared problem-solving behaviour, a culture of dialogue and the ability to de-escalate conflicts lived in more non-violent partnerships. Conflicts were discussed and negotiated respectfully. This significantly reduced the risk of escalation.
- **Self-sacrifice as a risk factor:** A risk pattern for violence was evident in self-abandonment and a lack of self-care, especially among women* with strong family responsibilities. The permanent suppression of one's own needs can lead to exhaustion, frustration, and increased potential for conflict. This acts as a breeding ground for conflictual or violent dynamics, especially when normative role expectations limit individual agency.

### Conditions at the level of social relationships (micro)

The micro level shows how family power relations, communication cultures and social practices can increase or decrease the likelihood of violence.

- **Equal decision-making:** A central prerequisite for non-violence in the data was the participatory negotiation of decisions. Quantitative data showed that when decisions are made jointly, the risk of experiencing violence is lower. Women* were particularly affected by violence when their partner has the final say. Joint decisions strengthened autonomy and were a key protective factor against violence. Conversely, controlling relationships in which financial, social or physical autonomy was restricted were already violent relationships.
- **Caring relationships**: Acting as partners in a relationship characterised by care, interest and commitment had a protective effect. When partners are perceived as "caring", violence was less common. Conversely, a perceived imbalance in caring behaviour increased the risk of violence.

- **Parenting and care sharing:** The way parenting is structured had a significant impact on the dynamics of violence. Violence arises, among other things, from excessive demands, unequal distribution of care work or disappointed expectations of parenting. Especially in the early stages of family life, but also due to multiple stresses (work, mental load, etc.), excessive demands can lead to escalations. Violence then often manifests itself as an expression of loss of control, helplessness or gender-role-related overload. Conversely, clear parenting structures, respectful communication with children and partners, cooperative parenting after separation and the conscious decision to be a role model contribute to reducing violence.
- **Culture of conflict resolution and non-violent communication:** The way conflicts are handled played a decisive role in whether violence occurs in relationships. A constructive culture of conflict resolution is based on respect, emotional control, the ability to accept criticism and "I" statements. Many interviewees described how they consciously de-escalate conflicts, for example by deliberately taking temporary breaks or seeking external support. A lack of conflict culture, for example in the form of avoidance or silence, on the other hand, posed a significant risk. Non-violent communication is not just a technique, but an expression of a conscious attitude of mutual understanding.
- **Family loyalties and social networks:** Family loyalty norms can promote violence if they legitimise boundary violations (e.g. "We deal with family problems internally, not with outsiders"). This often made it difficult for those affected to set boundaries or seek help. At the same time, the social environment can have ambivalent effects: while supportive friends and family members were important resources, their own stresses or normative role expectations (e.g. motherhood, obligations of solidarity) could also limit the options available to those affected.
- **Trivialisation as a condition for violence:** A central mechanism that perpetuates violence is its trivialisation in everyday life. When violence was trivialised as a "manageable emotional reaction" or "consequence of stress", it remained unrecognised and accepted. This attitude prevents reflection and change and reinforces violent relationship patterns.

### Conditions at the institutional level (meso)

At the meso level, structures, norms and rules of institutions such as gainful employment, education, social services or neighbourhoods do not have a direct effect, but rather influence family power relations, excessive demands or isolation via framework conditions, which can either promote or curb violence.

- **Paid work, power and violence:** Particularly significant factors were **working time arrangements** and the associated **distribution of economic power** in partnerships. Quantitative data showed that when paid working time is distributed equally, significantly fewer respondents report experiences of violence. Unequal distribution

increased the risk, especially when combined with gender norms based on the male breadwinner model.

- **Work-related stress and excessive demands:** In addition to economic factors, work-related stress also acted as a structural factor that promotes violence. The increasing demands of education, work and family life can lead to emotional overload, which can result in conflict or violence. The lack of institutional support (e.g. childcare) was particularly problematic, as it often pushed those affected to their limits. Violence arose here as a symptom of structural neglect, not just as an individual mistake.
- **Professional autonomy as a protective factor:** Professional autonomy can act as a protective factor against occupational stress. When people had room to manoeuvre – for example, by actively adapting their working conditions, renegotiating tasks, or moving to a different team –the risk of private conflicts escalating was reduced. One person, for example, deliberately changed their working environment to prevent psychological stress – a step that defused the potential for violence in their family environment.
- **Social pressure and normative control:** Social environments, such as neighbourhoods or village communities, could also have both, a caring and a violence-promoting effect. They could offer protection and support, for example through mutual help in everyday life or early intervention in conflicts. At the same time, however, if separations are stigmatised or families are under pressure to maintain an ideal image, a climate can arise in which problems are not openly discussed and thus help is not sought. This form of social control could lead to the suppression or trivialisation of violence, which contributed to its stabilisation in the long term.
- **Institutional gaps in responsibility and trust:** A recurring theme in the field of violence prevention is the structural overload of institutions. Professionals working in child and youth protection in our sample reported that measures are only taken once violence has already escalated. The causes lie less in a lack of responsibility than in a lack of resources, prioritisation constraints, and excessive caseloads. Prevention is thus often lacking, a structural problem that does not prevent violence but rather encourages it. Professionals in assisted living facilities also experienced massive overload. Lack of supervision, inadequate training and institutional negligence (e.g. sole responsibility for traumatised children by untrained staff) exposed not only those affected but also the staff to the risk of violence. Despite some gaps, there was selective trust in institutions, such as the police – especially among those affected who have a personal, close family relationship with security authorities and corresponding social capital in this regard. This can enable action to be taken in specific threatening situations, but it is no substitute for a structurally reliable prevention and intervention strategy.
- **Knowledge as a resource:** An important preventive strategy mentioned by professional participants is the acquisition and transfer of specialist knowledge, for example, in the form of training courses on violence prevention, sex education, or child

protection. Such skills enable not only individual understanding but also institutional change. The development of protection concepts, education programmes, and training courses for professionals shows that professionalisation can structurally anchor violence prevention.

### Conditions at the structural level (macro)

Social conditions such as laws, social security systems and economic structures have a significant influence on the risk of violence in family relationships.

- **Economic situation as a risk factor:** The financial situation proved to be a key factor: women in precarious economic situations experienced violence in their partnerships significantly more often (27%) than women who financially more independent; their violence exposure proportion was only about half as high. Financial dependence significantly limited people's ability to act and could prevent them from leaving violent relationships, regardless of their gender. Many remained in violent partnerships out of fear of financial loss.
- **Economic interdependence as a means of power:** In such situations, economic interdependence can act as an instrument of power that stabilises emotional and physical violence, especially in the form of coercive control.
- **Financial independence as a protective factor:** In contrast, financial independence had a protective effect: it strengthened the ability to separate, resolve conflicts constructively and live a non-violent life. A consciously concluded marriage contract with mutual waiver of claims in the event of separation also ensured autonomy and enabled an amicable solution.
- **Reflection on structural conditions:** However, the qualitative analysis revealed that many respondents hardly took structural conditions into account in their interpretations. Violence was often interpreted as an individual or purely relationship-related problem, which obscures the empirical fact that structural inequality – especially of an economic nature – creates central conditions for violence. It follows that sustainable violence prevention cannot only be addressed at the individual or relationship level, but also requires macro-political measures to reduce these structural risks.

## Forms of violence and violence constellations in childhood

The results of the GEQ-AT study show that **experiences of violence in childhood** were common and took various forms; childhood experiences of violence were more common than violence in current partnerships.

- Approximately one third of respondents reported **psychological violence** in their family of origin, such as shouting, ignoring or blaming. This form of violence is often trivialised and interpreted as "normal parenting", which indicates a societal tendency to downplay it. Around a quarter of respondents experienced **physical violence**, with

men* slightly more affected than women*. **Sexual violence** was also reported, particularly by women* (6.4%), while 2% of men* reported having been affected. In the interviews, only women* reported experiencing sexual violence, while men* mostly described witnessing such violence against female relatives.

- In addition to violence experienced first-hand, respondents also described **witnessing violence**, for example, between parents or other family members. Around 25% of respondents also reported violence by **siblings**, which can include both physical and psychological components. Violence was more often perpetrated by **fathers or male caregivers** (around 75%), but **mothers or female caregivers** were also frequently named as perpetrators – both in the form of physical violence and psychological violence, such as shaming or emotional blackmail.
- A **generational change** is evident with regard to experiences of violence (especially physical violence). Older respondents reported experiences of violence significantly more often (especially physical violence), which points to changing social norms in child-rearing.
- **Regional differences** are also apparent: people who grew up in larger cities were more likely to have experienced violence in the family. Around 35% of these people said they did not experience or observe violence in childhood, compared with around 48% of those who grew up in rural areas.
- Finally, it is evident that **non-family contexts** such as **school and neighbourhoods** are also relevant sites of violence. Men were more frequently affected than women, especially during their school years. The interviews also revealed that **queer children and young people** were often affected by exclusion, bullying and violent reactions.

## Conditions for violence and non-violence in childhood

### Conditions at the individual level (onto)

At this level, biographical factors that can be traced back to individual development and shape behaviour come to the fore:

- Key findings of the GEQ-AT study show an increased likelihood of experiencing violence in the current family if **violence** was perpetrated **against others** during childhood – i.e. if the person was the perpetrator themselves. Of those who did not use violence in childhood, more than half reported that they did not experience violence either. In contrast, this is true for only 28% of those who did use violence themselves. The GEQ-AT study thus demonstrates a statistical correlation between experiencing violence in the family and using violence oneself in childhood, without making any statements about the direction or causality of this correlation.
- In the qualitative interviews, self-perpetrated violence in childhood was rarely reported, which can probably be attributed, among other things, to shame and social

desirability. Many violent acts were downplayed in retrospect or not classified as relevant experiences of violence. In this way, a positive self-image could be maintained.

- Another influencing factor is **transgenerational trauma**, such as war, displacement or hunger experienced by the parents' generation. Such experiences not only affected the individuals themselves, but also influenced their parenting behaviour, emotional availability and impulse control. Respondents reported parental overload and unpredictable, violent reactions that could be related to unresolved war trauma.
- In addition, **gender-related demands** were a frequent condition for violence. In some cases, failure to meet traditional role expectations, such as talking back or non-conformist behaviour, was punished with physical violence. This mainly affected girls* who defied patriarchal norms. At the same time, reports of parents, especially fathers, who were torn between conflicting role models (breadwinner vs. present father) showed how role-specific overload can lead to emotionally charged behaviour and violence. In such cases, violence is a dysfunctional form of tension regulation resulting from unfulfillable demands on one's own role.

### Conditions at the level of social relationships (micro)

Analysis of the micro level illustrated how strongly **everyday relationship patterns and family power relations** can be linked to the risk of experiencing violence in childhood:

- The **division of care work** is particularly significant in this context. In traditional role distributions with regard to childcare, specifically when the mother took on the majority of the parenting tasks, more violence was experienced in the family. While almost two-thirds of those with an egalitarian division of labour reported no experience of violence, this was only the case for 40% of those who were mainly or exclusively raised by their mother. In the interviews, this unequal distribution is often described as a matter of course, accompanied by memories of occasional beatings or loud shouting, which are considered "normal at the time". Some respondents also reported how they had to take on additional responsibility for younger siblings or household chores as children. This **transfer of care work to children** was often accompanied by violence, for example in the form of punishment if the tasks were not completed.
- Another key factor is the **family decision-making structure**. When both parents had the final say – for example, on financial purchases or holiday plans – experiences of violence were reported significantly less often. When the father had the decision-making power, however, the risk of violence was highest (35%), higher than in the comparable study in Norway in 2009 (27%). Furthermore, if the father (tended to) have the final say during childhood, he was also more frequently reported as the perpetrator of violence. In the interviews**,** these asymmetrical family structures often manifest themselves in the form of **authoritarian, sometimes repressive relationship patterns** in which power is not shared but secured through control and psychological or physical sanctions.

- **Parenting style** also plays an important role: **authoritarian parenting** based on obedience, punishment and fear is often associated with physical or psychological violence. Parents (especially fathers) were regarded as the "head of the family" during childhood, especially by older respondents, whom children had to "obey". This kind of treatment creates a climate of control in which violence appears to be a legitimate means of enforcing parental authority. In contrast, people who grew up without violence report respectful, appreciative treatment within their families. Here**, motivation, friendliness, and dialogue-based conflict resolution** were at the forefront, making children feel safe and taken seriously.

Overall, the analyses of the micro level shows how strongly **everyday practices, role attributions and decision-making modes** in the family influence the risk of violence (or its avoidance). Violence occurs more frequently where tasks and power are unevenly distributed, emotional overload meets a lack of support , and authoritarian parenting patterns dominate. In contrast, egalitarian and appreciative family structures promote non-violent childhoods and contribute to long-term emotional stability.

### Conditions at the institutional level (meso)

Overall, it is clear that community structures can both reinforce and prevent violence, depending on whether they are characterised by control and isolation or by support, openness and solidarity. A look at the institutional level shows how strongly social institutions and community structures – such as schools, neighbourhoods and clubs – influence the risk of experiencing violence in childhood.

- The key finding here is that there is a link between a **violent environment outside the family** and violence within the family: children who experienced violence at school or in their neighbourhood are almost twice as likely to report violence in the family. The quantitative analysis thus confirms a **spiral of violence** in which violent contexts reinforce each other.
- The interviews also reveal that many of those affected experienced **different forms of violence** in their childhood: in addition to domestic violence, social insecurity, threats, and devaluation by those around them also shaped their experiences. Respondents reported bullying due to gender non-conformity, violent neighbourhoods and school cultures, or early pressure to conform to normative gender roles in order to protect themselves from potential violence. It is particularly striking how **gender-specific attributions,** such as the denigration of female characteristics in boys, are effective as a form of psychological violence.
- Another risk factor is **social pressure in small communities**, such as rural areas. There, the lower level of anonymity contributed to violence being treated as a "private matter" and not made public for fear of stigmatisation. This dynamic promotes isolation and makes it difficult to seek help.

- At the same time, the meso level also reveals **conditions** that **promote protection**: stable social networks, for example, within committed school communities, can cushion family stress and help prevent violence. When parents can draw on supportive networks, a social safety net is created that offers both emotional relief and practical everyday help, thereby preventing excessive demands and violence. Particularly strong parent networks strengthened the resilience of families in the long term through mutual awareness and solidarity.

### Conditions at the structural level (macro)

Macrostructures such as economic security and social recognition of diversity are central prerequisites for growing up free from violence. They act either as risk factors or protective factors, depending on whether they reinforce exclusion and stress or open up scope for action and recognition.

- A key finding is the importance of the economic **situation in the family of origin**: respondents who grew up in economically secure households report significantly less violence in their childhood. Conversely, the risk of family violence increased significantly with economic insecurity. Only around a third of respondents from financially precarious backgrounds reported a childhood free of violence. If, on the other hand, the economic situation was "good", this applied to over half.
- The qualitative interviews also illustrated this connection. Economic instability (e.g. due to uncertain employment situations, low recognition of educational qualifications or housing insecurity) limited parents' scope for action. This became particularly stressful when financial hardship collided with a lack of childcare options; for example, when children were left with a violent grandparent due to a lack of alternatives. Such biographical experiences clearly show how **structural poverty can contribute to family overload and thus violence.**
- In addition, **social norms and values** also influenced the risk of violence, for example in the form of **queerphobia and heteronormativity**. For example, respondents described having faced massive social rejection as teenagers because of their sexual orientation, which can lead to self-denial and psychological distress. Normative settings not only increased the risk of psychological violence and isolation, but could also exacerbate tensions within the family when social devaluation meets a lack of family support.

# 1. About the GEQ-AT project

The research project "Gender Equality and Quality of Life in Austria" (hereinafter referred to as GEQ-AT), ran from 2023 to 2025, and was the first comprehensive study in Austria to examine whether there are links between the balanced distribution of resources (decisions, paid and unpaid work, income) and non-violence in the immediate social environment. The results of this study are presented in this report, embedded in a theoretical-conceptual and secondary analytical framework. The specific focus and research background, as well as the main content of the GEQ-AT study are presented in the introduction below.

## Why is a balanced distribution of resources crucial for violence prevention?

Discussions about gender equality and care work have long been characterised by the absence of men* . Debates on the gender pay gap, gender pension gap and gender care gap have traditionally focused on improving the situation of women*, as they are clearly disadvantaged in terms of these gender-based differences. Stark inequalities show when examining independent financial security, low proportions of women in management and high proportions of women in low-paid occupations, the gendered load of unpaid care and domestic work, and the high incidence of violence against women in the immediate social environment.

Political, practical, and research landscapes are evolving significantly. Over the past few decades, two major developments have driven lasting changes in how we approach research and political practice: first, the study of intersectional differences (how multiple identities like race, gender, and class interact), and second, the critical examination of traditional binary gender categories. These developments have fundamentally expanded and reshaped existing frameworks in both academic research and political action

At the European level, the role of men* in relation to care work has increasingly been discussed, and men* are being addressed as actors in gender equality policy. International initiatives such as White Ribbon, MenEngage and Male Feminists Europe, for example, call on men* in campaigns such as MenCare to take a stronger stand against violence against women* and in favour male care work. The aim is to encourage more men* to become active agents of change in gender relations. For two decades now, critical masculinity studies have been developing the concept and theoretical framework of "caring masculinities" grounded in empirical studies (cf. Holter, Riesenfeld & Scambor, 2005; Scambor, Wojnicka & Bergmann, 2013). Caring masculinities refers to notions of masculinity that integrate values derived from feminist care ethics (e.g. empathy, attentiveness, mutual relatedness, shared responsibility, support) which relate to care activities in a very practical way. Caring masculinity includes caring for people in one's immediate social environment, for children, sick relatives or friends, for housework and the organisation of daily life, but also promotes the decision to take up paid care professions, the commitment to gender equality, caring for the environment and the fight against violence – all these are care-related aspects of an innovative masculinity that need to be established. A defining characteristic of caring masculinity is the positive relation to gender equality and the

rejection of violence and male dominance (cf. Elliott 2016). Hanlon (2012) has pointed out that men* in care work can overcome rigid traditional hegemonic norms of masculinity, while in return gaining "a more flexible definition of masculinity, male roles and men's caregiving abilities" (Gärtner & Scambor 2020: 22). Recent studies also show that a focus on care work has advantages for men, whereas traditional concepts of masculinity come with costs (health risks, violence, see also Messner 2000). Studies on "Gender Equality and Quality of Life" (GEQ studies for short) in Norway and Poland highlight the benefits of involved fatherhood, including better relationships with partners and children, a healthier life, and lower risks of conflict and domestic violence (cf. Holter & Krzaklewska 2017).

The GEQ studies, which were conducted in Norway in 2007 and Poland in 2015 by the Institute of Sociology at Jagiellonian University in collaboration with the Centre for Gender Research and the Institute of Health and Society at the University of Oslo and the Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine at Jagiellonian University Medical College, showed a lower likelihood of violence in gender-equal households (cf. Warat et al. 2017; Holter, Svare and Egeland 2009). In both countries, men and women reported very similar experiences of violence and decision-making in childhood. In families where decisions were not made jointly but by one parent ("had the final say"), violence or physical punishment towards children was more common – and was perpetrated by the parent who made the decisions. Children who grew up in gender-equal households (where both parents are equally involved in decision-making processes) reported much less frequent experiences of violence at home.

Building on the GEQ studies conducted in Norway and Poland, this study represents the first investigation into whether the correlations observed in Norway and Poland also hold true in Austria. The Austrian research, titled "Gender Equality and Quality of Life in Austria" (GEQ-AT), adapted and expanded upon the Norwegian and Polish colleagues' work and developed a comprehensive, multi-layered research plan specifically tailored for Austria. This adaptation involved both conceptual and methodological advances, which are detailed in the sections that follow.

## Objective of the GEQ-AT research and practice project

The GEQ-AT (Gender Equality and Quality of Life in Austria) project had the central objective of systematically investigating the effects of a balanced distribution of resources on quality of life and violence prevention in Austria. GEQ-AT analyses how a balanced distribution of paid work, care work and decision-making power in the immediate social environment can contribute to violence prevention. The central research question was: *How does a more equitable distribution of care work and decision-making structures within the family influence the incidence of violence and overall quality of life?*

## The overall project and its implementation

GEQ-AT was designed as a comprehensive social science research project combining quantitative and qualitative research approaches. The aim was to obtain as differentiated a picture as possible of gender relations, care work, and experiences of violence in Austria and to derive practical recommendations for politics and society.

The multi-facted data pool consists of several methodological components: A secondary data analysis examined current findings on paid work and unpaid care work, the prevalence of violence and socio-political conditions in Austria. Building on this, a representative quantitative survey was conducted to reveal the attitudes, experiences, and realities of the population with regard to gender equality, the distribution of resources (paid work, care work, and decision-making power), and the handling of conflicts and violence both in the family of origin and in the current life situation. Qualitative follow-up interviews with survey participants allowed for a nuanced clarification and expansion of quantitative findings. These in-depth discussions enabled a differentiated analysis of individual experiences with care work, violence and gender roles. Conditions for a balanced distribution of resources were examined, as were conditions for dealing with conflicts in the immediate social environment in as non-violent a manner as possible. Another central component was "Reflecting Groups": in nationwide expert panels, experts from the fields of violence prevention and gender equality work discussed initial findings and jointly developed practice-oriented recommendations.

GEQ-AT was implemented by the Institute for Men's and Gender Studies at the Association for Men's and Gender Issues in Styria (VMG) in collaboration with L&R Social Research. While the Institute for Men's and Gender Studies was responsible for project coordination and qualitative research, L&R Social Research carried out and evaluated the quantitative survey. The project ran over a period of more than two years – from December 2022 to March 2025 – and was funded by the Federal Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection.

## Key content

The GEQ-AT study focused on investigating the links between balance in the distribution of resources (paid work, care work, decision-making), violence prevention, and quality of life. The research team chose a multidimensional analytical approach that took into account key areas of life as well as structural and cultural conditions. The study collected data on participants' family backgrounds as well as current living arrangements. These survey questions were originally developed for the Norwegian GEQ study, then used in the Polish follow-up research, and finally adapted to reflect the Austrian context.

- One thematic focus was on attitudes towards gender roles and equality. Here, the survey examined how people think about the distribution of paid work and care work, to what extent they reject or endorse gender stereotypes, and how equality is perceived in everyday life.
- Another focus was on the actual division of care and paid work within households. The survey recorded who in the family is responsible for housework, childcare or care, how

paid work is organised and to what extent parental leave, part-time work or care responsibilities are taken on by women and men.

- Another central topic was violence and violence prevention. This item category focused on violence experienced or observed, particularly in the family context.
- The study also looked at quality of life, which was defined in general terms as subjective well-being and in more specific terms as mental and physical health.
- In addition, material and immaterial resources such as income, living situation, social networks and access to support services were analysed. Questions about decision-making power in the private and family environment were also asked, such as how decisions are made in partnerships or in the family of origin.

These central dimensions were addressed in both the quantitative survey and the qualitative interviews and form the content basis of the analysis. The mix of methods made it possible to link subjective perspectives with structural contexts and to gain insights relevant for policy and practice on multiple interconnected analytical levels (onto, micro, meso, macro).

## Content dimensions of the GEQ-AT survey

**Table1: Content dimensions of the GEQ-AT survey**

| Dimensions | Thematic focus |
|---|---|
| **Gender roles & equality** | Attitudes towards equality, role models, acceptance of gender-equitable conditions |
| **Care &paid work** | Distribution of housework, childcare, nursing care, use of parental leave and part-time work |
| **Violence & violence prevention** | Experienced/observed violence, contexts of violence |
| **Quality of life & health** | Subjective well-being, mental and physical health |
| **Resources &participation** | Income, living conditions, social networks, support services |
| **Decision-making &participation** | Co-determination in private and public life, decision-making processes in partnerships and in the family of origin |

## Quality Framework

Two advisory boards were established to ensure the quality and practical orientation of the GEQ-AT research project: a practical advisory board and a scientific advisory board. Both committees have made an important contributions to the sound implementation and further development of the project.

The practical advisory board was composed of representatives of key agencies in gender equality and violence prevention work, including representatives from ministries, interest groups (Chamber of Labour, Austrian Trade Union Federation, Industrialists' Association), those working with survivors of violence (e.g. women's shelters), women's work (abz Austria) and men's and boys' work (e.g. DMÖ - Dachverband Männerarbeit Österreich). Its central function was to provide an ongoing feedback loop between science and practice: In three board meetings during the project period, the course of the project was coordinated, the methodological approach was discussed, and the practical relevance of the research results was critically reflected. The advisory board thus enabled a continuous transfer of knowledge to administration, civil society and professional practice. By involving experts from various fields, different perspectives could be integrated and the feasibility of the findings could be collaboratively established.

The scientific advisory board was international and consisted of three experts, who were involved in the precursor studies. Their task was to critically accompany the design and implementation of the study and to ensure that the Austrian implementation remains compatible with international standards. The advisory board members supported the project team specifically in developing the research design, coordinating the methodology and analysis, and structuring the final report and summary. They also contributed valuable insights from comparative studies in Norway and Poland, for example, with regard to the link between gender equality, care work and violence prevention.

Both advisory boards thus strengthened the quality and relevance of the project in different ways. They made a decisive contribution to ensuring that GEQ-AT was able to deliver scientifically sound and valid findings, that are simultaneously applicable and transferable to practise settings.

## Sustainability and future measures

The findings of GEQ-AT are intended and expected to have an impact beyond the project period. Recommendations for strengthening gender-equality-oriented partnership and family models and reducing gender-based violence were derived in collaboration with experts throughout Austria. Key findings from the GEQ-AT study have been compiled in an information brochure together with practical action steps for policymakers, administrators and NGOs[2] . The international comparability and dissemination of results is ensured by publication in English[3] and cooperation with research institutions in Norway and Poland.

The GEQ-AT project makes an important contribution to research and practise of combating gender-based violence in international comparative perspective. In the long term, the results should help to shape social and political measures in Austria and beyond that enable a more gender-equal and violence-free future for all genders.

[2] https://vmg-steiermark.at/de/forschung/projekt/geq-gender-equality-and-quality-life

[3] https://vmg-steiermark.at/de/forschung/projekt/geq-gender-equality-and-quality-life

# 2. About the research methodology

## Research methodology and analytical approach

The GEQ-AT research practice project was designed as a mixed-methods social science study and combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a multi-layered understanding of gender equality, care work, violence, and quality of life in Austria. In addition to our own surveys, we also analysed secondary data and social policy regulations. These included, for example, statistics on time use, care and paid work, take-up of parental leave benefits, data from violence studies (reported and unreported cases), and legal regulations on violence prevention.

## Linking quantitative and qualitative surveys

The focus was on a representative quantitative survey of the Austrian population aged between 18 and 80. Almost 2,300 people were surveyed, taking into account gender, age, educational level, migration background, and regional distribution. The survey was conducted primarily via an online questionnaire, supplemented by paper questionnaires distributed to counselling centres and telephone interviews. The online survey was programmed in several languages: in addition to German, it was also available in English, BKS (Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian), and Turkish. Upon request, the survey could also be conducted by telephone in other languages such as Russian, Arabic or French. The aim was to gather information about attitudes and experiences in relation to care work, gainful employment, violence, decision-making and equality. The results were evaluated using SPSS in a descriptive, bivariate and multivariate manner; intersectional analyses were also used to highlight differences along lines of gender, education, origin, and other relevant dimensions.

Unlike the GEQ precursor studies in Norway and Poland, qualitative interviews were conducted with 63 participants in Austria[4] . The focus was on experiences of violence and decision-making relationships in the families of origin, as well as the development of gender equality-oriented actions and attitudes. At the same time, causal factors for the development of gender-traditional attitudes and behaviours were identified. The aim of the qualitative study was to conduct an in-depth analysis of the complex relationships between gender equality in childhood, family and working life, as well as violence prevention, and quality of life. Specifically, the qualitative study also focused on questions of how gender-equitable relationships can contribute to violence prevention and how they affect the social development and quality of life of the respondents. All interviews were conducted in German with the support of an interview guide. The interview partners were primarily recruited through the quantitative survey. Among other things, answers to questions about experiences of violence and decision-making relationships

[4] All three GEQ studies were combined with qualitative studies, but in different ways. The Norwegian survey was based on earlier qualitative studies (see Holter, Øystein G. and Aarseth, Helene (1993). Menns livssammenheng. Oslo: Ad Notam Gyldendal), while the Polish survey was combined with focus group interviews (see Warat et al. 2017).

with caregivers in childhood were decisive for the selection of interview partners. The analysis was carried out using qualitative content analysis according to Mayring (2010), supported by MAXQDA software. Analyses focused on subjective patterns of interpretation, life histories and family role attributions.

Both survey approaches were coordinated and correlated during the evaluation in order to link the results of the quantitative survey with those of the qualitative surveys.

### A brief digression: The matched pair approach in the GEQ-AT study

Based on international preliminary studies (including STAMINA[5] ), an innovative matched pair approach was used in the comparative analysis of the qualitative interviews in the GEQ-AT study wherever possible. The aim of this approach was to reveal the complex interactions between the distribution of resources, violence, and care work in a biographical context. Of particular interest was the question why people with similar starting points develop different life courses, response patterns and attitudes towards the distribution of resources and violence.

In concrete terms, this meant that individuals with comparable structural characteristics – such as gender, age, migration background, educational background, socio-economic status, and family constellation – who currently differ significantly in their attitudes or life constellations were specifically selected for the qualitative interviews. For example, individuals who had similar experiences in their families of origin but currently find themselves in different situations in terms of resource distribution and conflict management were compared with one another. This methodological comparison was intended to provide a more in-depth analysis of differences in how individuals respond to structural stress, violence, and gender equality dynamics. The focus was not on individual deficits or successes, but on the conditions and resources that enable people to take different paths under comparable circumstances – for example, towards non-violent conflict resolution, partnership-based division of tasks or active equality practices.

The matched pair approach thus served to provide a differentiated understanding of scope for action and resilience in the context of social inequality. It allowed individual narratives to be viewed in the light of structural conditions and to identify, by way of comparison, which factors (e.g. social networks, access to support services, individual attitudes) promote or hinder equality and violence prevention. On this basis, practical recommendations were also developed – for example, for politics, education, psychosocial work and violence prevention.

### Reflecting Groups as an interface between science and practice

The results of the GEQ-AT study were discussed in so-called Reflecting Groups with experts from the fields of violence prevention and gender equality work. Participants in the Reflecting Groups were proposed by the GEQ-AT Practice Advisory Board (see the Quality Assurance section for details) and invited by the research group to participate in the Reflecting Groups. These

[5] STAMINA Violence resilience among young people, EU-Daphne. URL: https://vmg-steiermark.at/de/forschung/projekt/stamina-gewaltresilienz-bei-jugendlichen-eu-daphne [13.08.2025].

discussion formats took place in all federal states and at the national level. The aim was to develop practical recommendations for politics and society and to further develop approaches to violence prevention.

Reflecting Groups serve as cooperative spaces for reflection, where scientific findings and professional practice enter into dialogue. They enable participants to evaluate, supplement, or critically question research results based on their own experiences. As Wigger et al. (2012) emphasise, this exchange gives rise to mutual learning, in which different bodies of knowledge are productively linked.

This methodological approach can trigger both individual and collective professionalisation processes. Working together on interpretations and approaches to action strengthens the relevance of research for practice – and vice versa.

In the final step, the results of all surveys were combined in a data triangulation. By linking quantitative, qualitative and secondary analytical data, comprehensive insights were gained, and key correlations were condensed – for example, between gender roles, violence prevention and quality of life. The empirical findings thus obtained served as a basis for recommendations for action in policy and practice.

## Overview of respondents to the quantitative and qualitative surveys

### Quantitative sample

The quantitative survey was administered from the beginning of September 2023 to the end of June 2024.It was conducted primarily online, but also using printed questionnaires distributed by counselling centres and by telephone. In order to achieve a representative survey, different approaches were used to reach the respondents: first, broad mailings were sent out via various project partners, such as counselling centres and employee representatives, as well as via our own distribution lists. Then all municipalities, various counselling centres and associations from a wide range of sectors throughout Austria were contacted and asked to distribute the survey. Many forwarded the call for participation in the survey, some requested paper questionnaires, which they displayed and distributed in their agencies, and some provided access to interview partners for personal interviews. Thanks to this diverse support, **2,295 fully completed questionnaires** were included in the analysis (a further 802 questionnaires had to be excluded because they lacked answers that were particularly relevant for the evaluation). Despite broad support from various organisations, people with only compulsory schooling or no completed education were less well represented than in the overall population, as were people over the age of 65. The sample was therefore reweighted to obtain the best possible representative results. This means that the margin of error for the results – based on the underlying population of the Austrian resident population aged between 15 and 79 in 2023 of around 7,277,170 people and a significance level of 95% – is around 2%.

Despite extensive efforts in advertising the survey, making it available in various languages, cooperating with migrant organisations, and weighting the data, it was not possible to ensure representativeness in terms of migration background, as the proportion of people with a migration background was below average in relation to the total population. Statistical analytics do not allow for differentiation between migration backgrounds.

The following table shows the distribution of key characteristics of the resident population based on Statistics Austria data and compares it with the weighted distribution in the quantitative GEQ-AT survey.

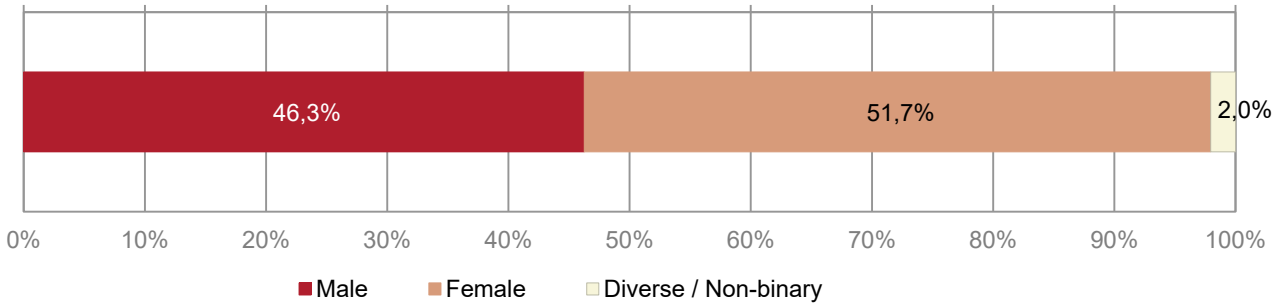
**Table2: Distribution of characteristics of the Austrian resident population and within the sample after weighting**

| | | Resident population | GEQ-AT sample |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 48. | 47.2 |
| | Female | 51.2 | 52.8 |
| | Total | 100 | 100 |
| Age | 16 to | 11.9 | 8.4 |
| | 25 to 64 | 70 | 81.5 |
| | 65 to 80 | 18.1 | 10 |
| | Total | 10 | 100 |
| Education | No secondary school leaving certificate | 65.1 | 53.3 |
| | High school diploma | 17 | 26.4 |
| | Tertiary qualification | 18 | 20 |
| | Total | 10 | 100 |
| Federal state | Burgenland | 3.4 | 5.0 |
| | Carinthia | 6.4 | 4.6 |
| | Lower Austria | 18.9 | 19.3 |
| | Upper Austria | 16 | 21.6 |
| | Salzburg | 6 | 7 |
| | Styria | 14.1 | 14 |
| | Tyrol | 8.5 | 6.5 |
| | Vorarlberg | 4.4 | 6 |
| | Vienna | 21.5 | 15.6 |
| | Total | 100 | 10 |

Sources: Resident population: Statistics Austria (2023), Microcensus Labour Force Survey 2022 (aged 20 and over) and *Statistics Austria (2024), Coordinated Employment Statistics 2022 (aged 16 to 80); For the GEQ-AT sample: weighted data set L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023.

Women* made up 52% of respondents, around 46% of respondents were male* and 2% were diverse or non-binary. The latter group corresponds to 25 people and is therefore statistically too small to be reported separately.

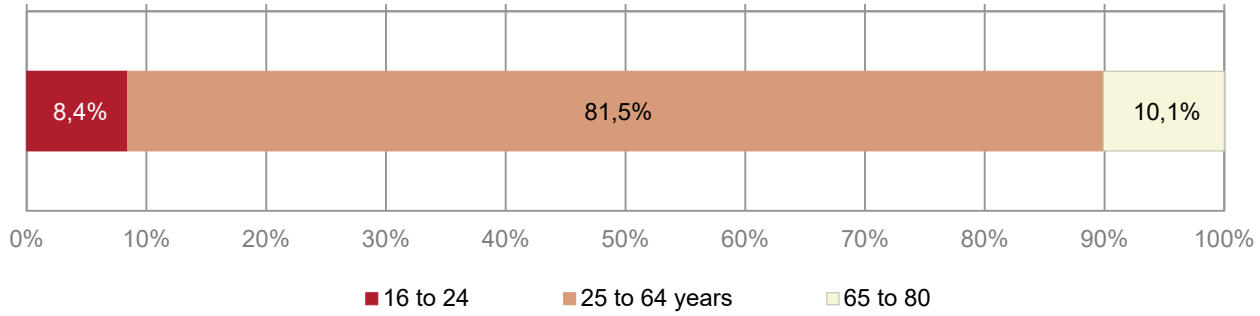
**Figure1: Gender distribution in the quantitative sample**




Source: L& R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=2,295, n miss=8, weighted sample.

In terms of age, there is a strong concentration of people aged between 25 and 64 (81.5%); 8% were under 25 and 10% were over 64.

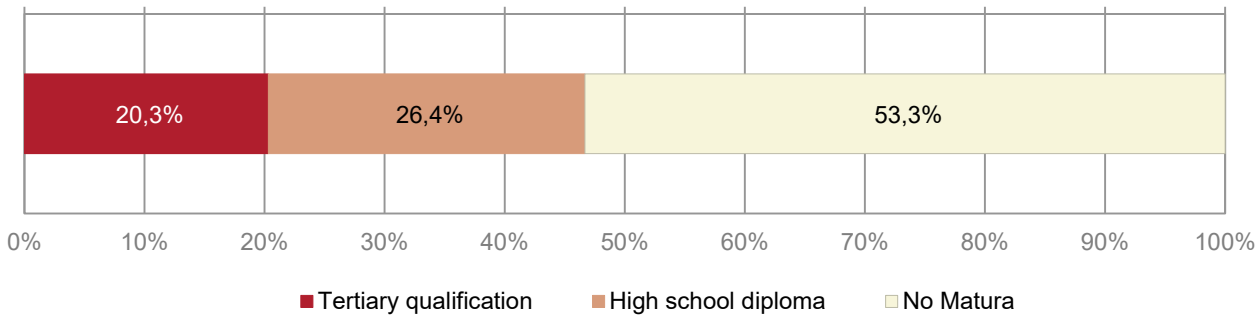
**Figure2: Age distribution of the quantitative sample**




Source: L& R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=2,295, weighted sample.

In terms of educational attainment, slightly more than half (53%) did not have a secondary school leaving certificate, 26% had completed secondary school and 20% had a tertiary qualification.

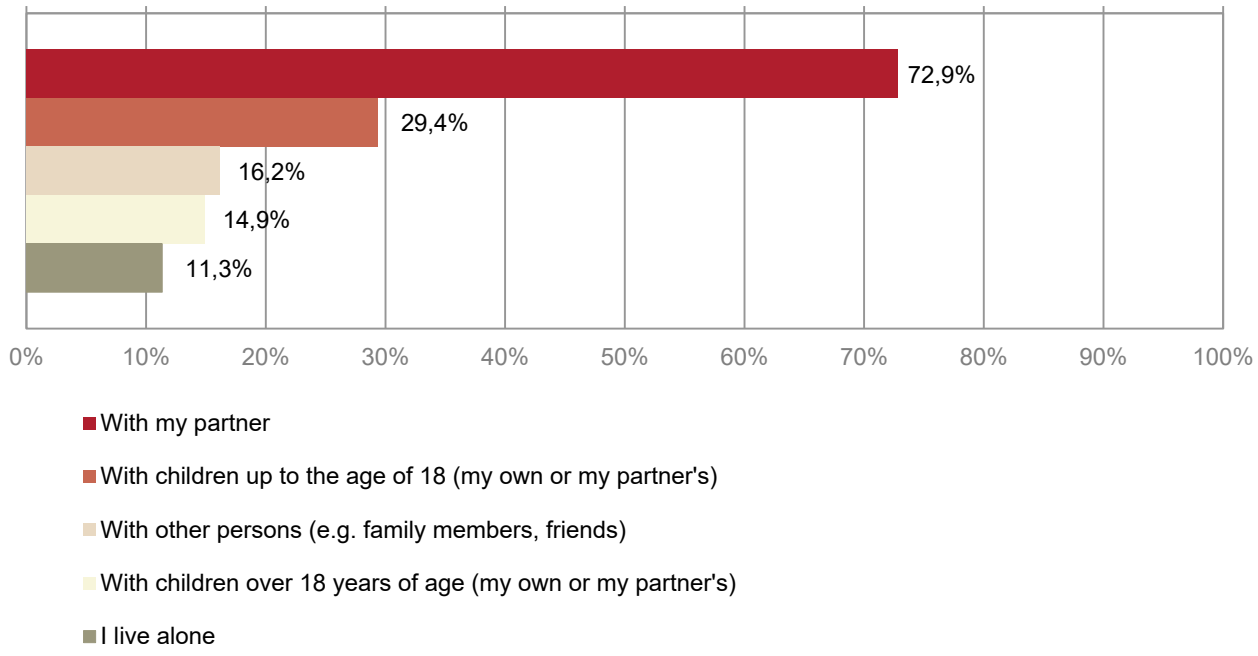
**Figure3: Educational distribution in the quantitative sample[6]**




Source: L& R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=2,295, n miss=8, weighted sample.

In terms of household composition, around three-quarters live with their partner in a shared household, and 29% with children up to the age of 18. 15% also live with adult children over the age of 18 in the same household and 16% with other people. 11% also live alone.

**Figure4: Household composition in the quantitative sample**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=2,295, n miss=122, weighted sample.

## Qualitative sample

[6] The "Matura" is the final examination taken by students at the end of secondary school in Austria. Passing the Matura is a requirement for entering university.

As part of the GEQ-AT study, 63 qualitative interviews were conducted and evaluated. The material collected proved to be extremely rich: the interviews were remarkably in-depth and diverse in terms of content, enabling a high degree of theoretical saturation to be achieved.

The interview partners were recruited in two main ways: People were recruited to participate in the in-depth interviews via the preliminary quantitative survey. Secondly, individuals were approached via institutions, associations and social services (e.g. women's shelters, counselling centres) through which the quantitative questionnaire was made available. This multi-stage recruitment strategy made it possible to achieve a diverse and heterogeneous sample.

The interviews were conducted both in person and online via Zoom; in individual cases, the interviews were conducted by telephone. This methodological openness in the form of data collection proved helpful in minimising potential barriers to access, such as geographical distance or time constraints on the part of the respondents. The interviews lasted between approximately one hour and four hours.

The qualitative interviews were evaluated using qualitative content analysis based on the principles of Mayring (2010). The analysis was supported by the use of MAXQDA software.

### Characteristics of the qualitative sample

The qualitative sample comprises a total of 63 people. In terms of gender, 43 people identified as female, 17 as male, two as non-binary and one as agender.

The age range of the respondents is from 20 to 76 years. The largest age group is people in their 30s (n=22), followed by those in their 40s (n=14) and 20s (n=11). People in their 50s (n=11), 60s (n=4) and one person in their 70s are also represented.

In terms of educational attainment, there is a clear concentration in tertiary education[7] : 44 respondents have a relevant qualification, 19 respondents have completed secondary education[8], no respondents in the sample have primary education[9].

There is some variation in terms of migration biographies: the majority of respondents (n=52) were born and raised in Austria. Five participants grew up in Germany and currently live in Austria. Six people can be classified as having an international background. Within this group, two participants come from EU countries and two from non-EU countries. Two other individuals come from multidimensional backgrounds (e.g. combinations of Austria, Germany, Japan, Turkey).

The respondents have different biographical residential contexts. Nineteen people lived in rural areas both during their childhood and at the time of the survey. Another 20 people grew up in rural areas but now live in urban environments. The reverse is true for an equal number of people who come from an urban context but now live in rural areas. Only four people lived in

[7] Tertiary education refers to college and university degrees and comparable qualifications.
[8] Secondary education includes further education or apprenticeships.
[9] Primary education comprises basic schooling up to lower secondary level (e.g. compulsory schooling).

urban environments both during their childhood and currently. This means that 23 out of 63 people have lived in the same place throughout their lives.

## Experiential spaces in the qualitative sample

### *Experiences of violence in the family context*

Data collection and analysis were based on a broad understanding of violence that took into account different forms of violence (including psychological, physical, sexual, economic, digital, social and witnessed violence and stalking) as well as different levels of violence (interpersonal, intrapersonal, institutional, structural and cultural dimensions).

Of the 63 people surveyed, 45 reported experiences of violence in their childhood, while 18 experienced a largely violence-free childhood. Currently, 45 people live in largely violence-free family circumstances, while 18 respondents are currently affected by violence. It should be noted that among the 18 people currently affected, six had a largely violence-free childhood, while twelve had already experienced violence in their childhood. Conversely, of the 18 people who described a largely violence-free childhood, twelve also report violence-free living conditions today, while six are currently affected by violence.

### *Balance in the distribution of resources in the family context*

In the collection and analysis of the qualitative data, a distinction was made between a balanced and unbalanced distribution of resources in the immediate social environment. The distribution of resources was assessed on the basis of several dimensions, in particular the distribution of paid work and care work, and the power to make decisions and have agency within the family.

Of the 63 people surveyed, 55 reported an unbalanced distribution of resources in their childhood, while eight described a balanced distribution of resources in their family of origin. Currently, 22 people live in family constellations with a balanced distribution of resources, while 41 individuals currently experience an unbalanced distribution of resources. It should be noted that among the 22 people who currently experience gender equality and a balanced distribution of resources, four grew up under similar conditions in childhood, while 18 report a change (for details, see sections 3.2 to 3.4).

### *Comparative cases – "matched pairs"*

For the in-depth analysis, so-called "matched pairs" were identified within the sample. These are pairs of cases that have identical socio-demographic characteristics – including, gender, age (±10 years), educational level, origin, and place of residence – and also have a comparable starting situation in their family of origin in terms of experienced violence and gender relations.

However, it is crucial that these cases differ in their current family situation. For example, a matched pair is formed when two people with comparable backgrounds and similar childhood

experiences (e.g. both grew up in conditions of violence and gender inequality) now live in different constellations – for example, one person in a non-violent and gender-equitable environment (balanced distribution of resources), the other in a setting characterised by violence and inequality.

# 3. Gender relations, care work and division of labour in families and partnerships

## 3.1. Attitudes and role models: gender roles and equality

The GEQ-AT study examines how social models of gender, family, and work become effective in specific life contexts. The focus is not only on legal frameworks and gender equality policies, but also on the cultural and normative ideas that shape everyday decisions, family arrangements, and institutional structures. Against the backdrop of persistent gender inequalities – for example, in the division of care work, participation in the labour market, or access to political decision-making – the attitudes of respondents towards gender roles, the division of labour, and family models are particularly relevant. They provide insight into how equality is anchored in society, where normative breaks become visible and what tensions exist between the ideal and everyday practice.

Based on quantitative and qualitative data collected as part of the GEQ-AT study, this chapter examines the prevailing attitudes and beliefs regarding gender, equality and the division of labour within the family in Austria, the differences that emerge along socio-demographic lines, and the extent to which normative ideas are stabilised or questioned in everyday life. Particular attention is paid to the question of how heteronormative and binary patterns of order are reproduced in family contexts, but also how they are challenged and deconstructed. The combination of standardised quantitative findings and qualitative findings from the interviews allows for a differentiated examination of areas of tension between ideal and reality, structure and action, and norm and deviation.

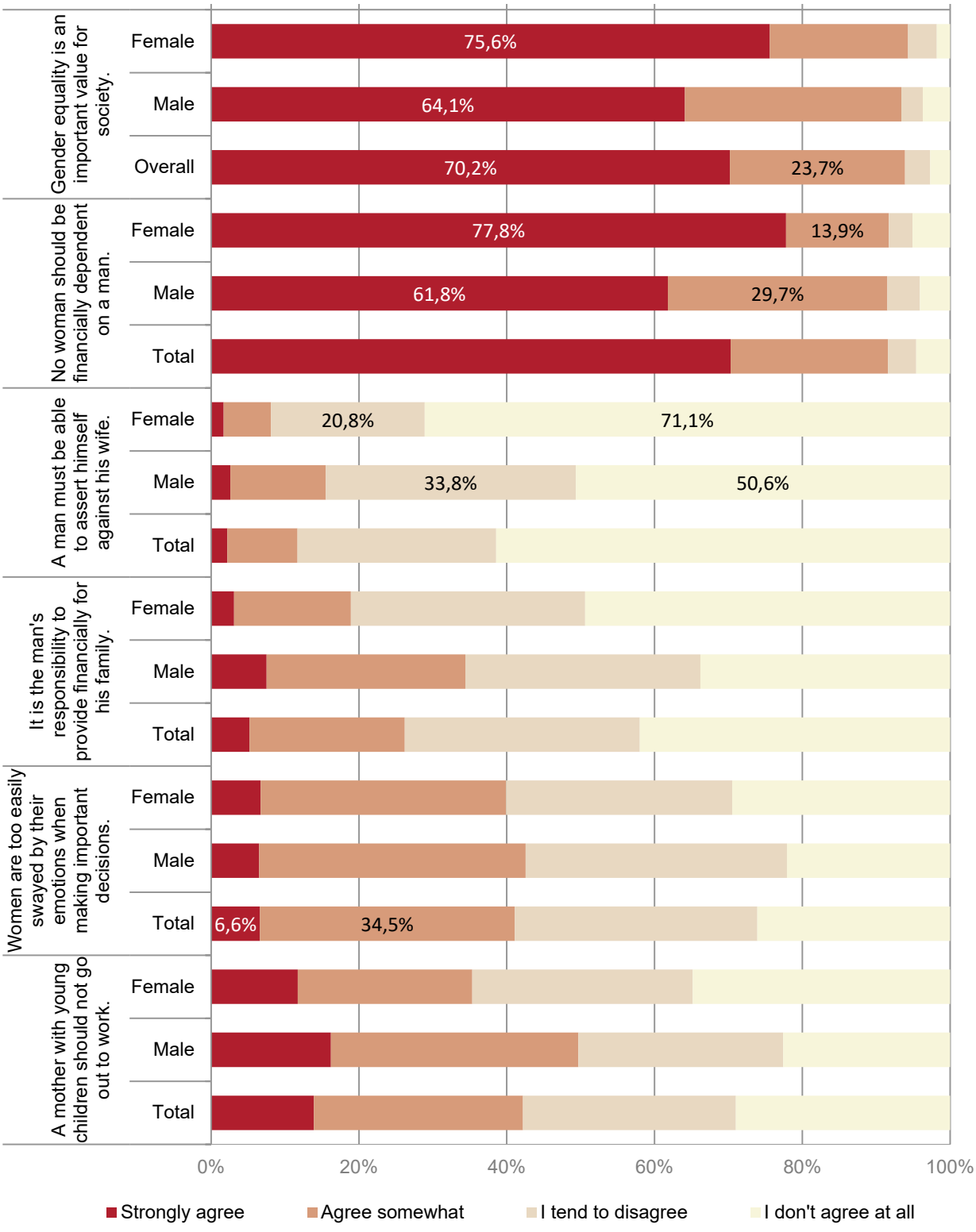
### Quantitative findings: attitudes towards family roles, equality and gender roles

The results of the quantitative survey clearly show that the vast majority of respondents consider gender equality to be an important social value. 70% strongly agree with this statement, and just under a quarter tend to agree. A gender-related difference is apparent here: while 76% of women surveyed strongly agree with the statement, the figure for men is 64% (see Figure 5).

Conversely, statements that endorse traditional gender roles are rejected by the majority – particularly among female respondents. For example, 78% of women* strongly agree with the statement "No woman should be financially dependent on a man", with a further 14% agreeing somewhat. Among men*, almost two-thirds strongly agree, with around 30% agreeing somewhat. The statement "A man must assert himself against his wife" is particularly strongly rejected: 71% of women* surveyed strongly disagree with this, with a further 21% somewhat disagreeing. Among men*, however, only just over 50% strongly disagree with this statement, with a further 34% somewhat disagreeing. Here, too, there are clear gender differences. Men* are also more likely to believe that it is the man's* responsibility to provide financially for the

family and that women* with small children should not work. The statement "Women are too strongly guided by their feelings when making important decisions" shows smaller gender differences but also the highest approval ratings, with around 40% of respondents agreeing somewhat or completely.

**Figure 5: Attitudes towards gender equality and family role models, by gender**



Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=2,295, n miss between 89 and 206, weighted sample; values below 3% not shown for better clarity.

Taken together,[10] the results show that two-thirds of respondents tend to reject traditional family and gender roles, while one-third tend to agree with them. Attitudes differ depending on socio-demographic characteristics. Similar to the question about the value of equality for society, female respondents show a stronger rejection of traditional attitudes, with a difference of almost 20 percentage points (76% vs. 57%). In addition, differences become apparent regarding the age of the respondents: people aged 65 and over tend to agree with a traditional view of family and gender roles (47%). Among younger respondents, at least one-third reject such a view, depending on their age category (see table appendix).

Place of residence also appears to be related to the attitudes of respondents. Almost 80% of those living in larger cities (over 100,000 inhabitants) at the time of the survey (tend to) reject traditional role models. This applies to slightly more than two-thirds of those living in medium-sized and small towns and to around 63% in rural communities (see table appendix).

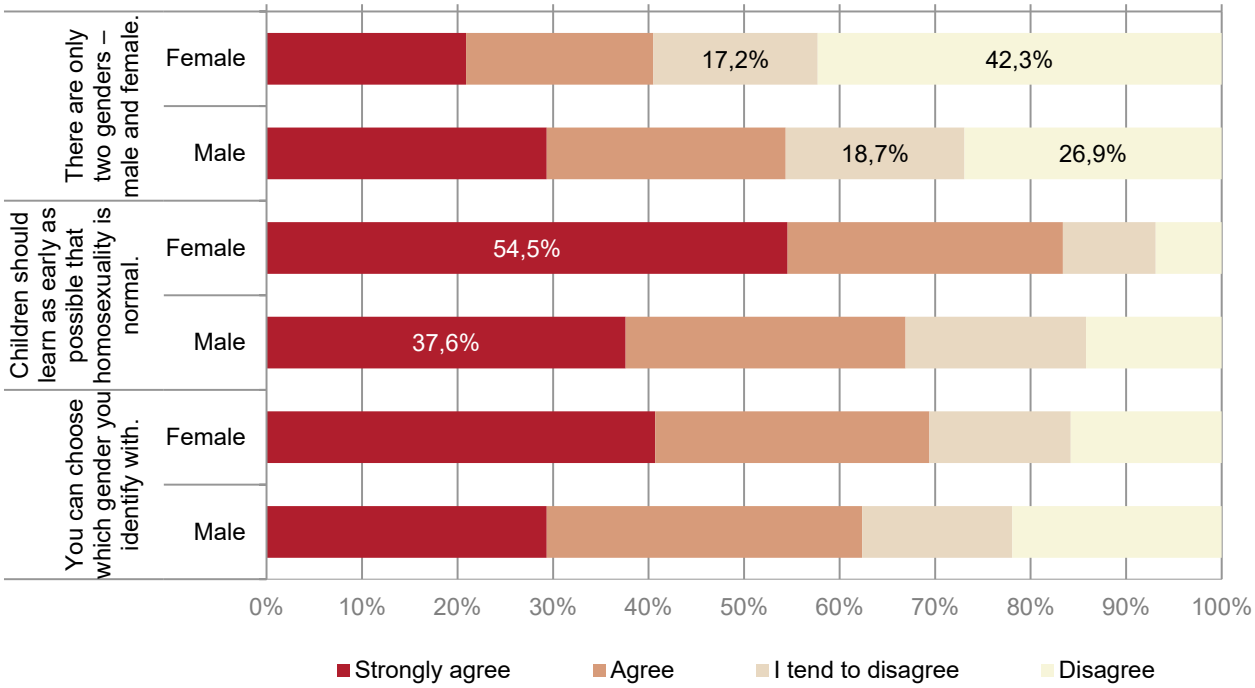
A linear correlation can be observed with regard to educational attainment: almost 90% of people with a tertiary education (tend to) reject traditional gender roles. Among respondents with a secondary school leaving certificate, the figure is around two-thirds, and among those with a lower level of education around 58% reject traditional gender roles (see table appendix).

A much greater variation can be seen in questions that assess heteronormative attitudes[11].

[10] The content of the attitude questions shown in Figure 5 was recoded, combined into a summary index and then divided into the categories "(rather) rejection" and "(rather) agreement".

[11] Heteronormativity is a term from gender and queer theory that describes a social assumption that heterosexuality and binary gender orders (i.e. "male" and "female") are natural, universal and unchangeable.

**Figure 6: Attitudes towards equality and heteronormative values, by gender**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=2,295, n miss between 89 and 206, weighted sample

A quarter of respondents strongly agree with the statement that there are only two genders, 22% of respondents "somewhat agree", with women* again questioning the binary gender system more than men*. A similar pattern emerges in questions concerning the questioning of heteronormative ideas. For example, more than half of women* surveyed strongly agree that children should learn early on that homosexuality is a normal form of sexual orientation – an approval rating that is around 17 percentage points higher than that of male* respondents. There are also clear differences in the statement that people should be able to determine for themselves which gender they belong to: women* reject traditional gender attributions significantly more often than men* and are more supportive of gender self-determination.

Similar patterns can also be seen according to level of education, with people with a tertiary education tending to reject heteronormative attitudes, whereas this social perspective is particularly prevalent among people without a secondary school diploma (see table appendix).

## Qualitative findings: Attitudes towards gender equality between normative models, structural persistence and individual negotiations

The qualitative interviews point to a heterogeneous spectrum of gender-related attitudes that oscillate between affirmative reproduction of traditional role patterns, pragmatic and flexible arrangements, and egalitarian models. The interviewees' ideas about the organisation of paid work and care work and the significance of gender in the family context are not only an expression of individual preferences, but are also deeply interwoven with social conditions, normative expectations and structural inequalities.

The following analysis systematises these attitudes along five central dimensions: (A) gender role attitudes, (B) ideas about the division of labour, and (C) economic factors. Perspectives on gender beyond the binary (D) are examined, as is the tension between idealised notions and lived reality (E).

### A) Gender role attitudes: between tradition and change

In line with the concept of doing gender (cf. West & Zimmerman 1987), it becomes clear that gender order in family contexts does not exist as a stable category, but is actively created, confirmed or even questioned in everyday interactions. The interviews point to a broad spectrum of gender-specific attitudes – from traditional-conservative to critical-reflective positions that consciously question normative expectations of gender.

Individual statements can be interpreted in terms of undoing gender (cf. Deutsch 2007), i.e., as practices that deliberately undermine or deconstruct prevailing gender norms. At the same time, other statements show how deeply hegemonic notions of masculinity (cf. Connell 1995 & 2015) – for example, in the form of breadwinner ideals or emotional restraint – remain anchored in family self-perceptions.

A considerable proportion of respondents, especially older ones, advocate a division of labour within the family, with men* as the main breadwinners and women* as the primary care providers. These constellations are often characterised by a helping masculinity: men* participate in caregiving tasks on an ad hoc basis without taking on primary responsibility – a pattern that stabilises structural asymmetries without fundamentally changing them (cf. Daminger 2019).

> *The children were so proud that I was doing this* (...) *my husband was so supportive. He took time off work so that I could go on the field trip. And he always took the children at the weekend because I* (...) *had* (...) *one more lecture or seminar to attend. And my husband always looked after the children.*
>
> (50 OP, female, 61)

In individual cases, naturalising arguments emerge in which gender roles are deterministically justified by biological differences and unequal gender relations. These perspectives point to the social competition between different regimes of gender interpretation – for example, between essentialist and constructivist approaches (cf. Butler 1990; Klinger 2010).

At the same time, at least as many respondents express a critical attitude towards existing power relations. Respondents reflect on social setbacks in equality policies, point to conservative gender norms, and call for political and cultural transformations towards actual gender justice. In particular, the political developments of recent years are perceived as problematic, as conservative political forces are perceived to favour structures that perpetuate existing inequalities.

> *"I think society itself* (...) *has become more conservative again in recent years. I feel that we have taken a step backwards in Austria.* (...) *And I think this is not only happening at a*

*social level, but also at a political level. When you look at which social benefits are being cut, which are being increased, what is money really being spent on? Which parties, which politicians are elected to which offices, and for what? What do they say?* (...) *Then you realise that something has simply developed in a negative direction. Above all, it's not moving towards more gender justice or gender equality, but simply backwards again. That's how I see it. And that's reflected in society.*"

(21 JS, female, 29)

### B) Ideas about the division of labour: between equal distribution, pragmatism, and scepticism

Discussions on the division of paid work and care work can be divided into three main categories:

#### *Equal distribution as an ideal*

Numerous respondents formulate an explicitly egalitarian model that strives for a 50:50 division of paid work and care work. They argue for fairness between partners, the relevance for child development, and the need to reduce gender-related inequalities such as the gender pay gap, gender pension gap, and gender care gap (cf. Fraser 1994; Winker 2015). From this perspective, care work is understood not only as a female task, but as a shared responsibility – a view that ties in with the concept of caring masculinities (cf. Scambor et al. 2013; Elliott 2016).

"*So both have to go to work.* (...) *And for me, that's simply part of a fairer distribution* (...) *and perhaps also part of a societal rethink. Firstly, more women* need to be prepared to stand up for themselves and really say, 'Hey, this isn't working. I want it to be different.' And on the other hand, men are just as willing to be there for their children and say, 'Hey, I want this and I'm not going to let my boss push me around because I want to take parental leave.' Yes, at my current workplace, I see this as a very positive example, as some men have already taken extended parental leave.* (...) *One has been on parental leave for a year and a half. Another was on parental leave for nine months. Another was on parental leave for three months. Three months, but that's still longer than the average.*"

(21 JS, female, 29)

#### *Situation-dependent and pragmatic models*

Other interviewees prefer a flexible division of labour that is based on economic, emotional, and practical everyday conditions. Although these attitudes reflect a commitment to gender equality, they are embedded in structural inequalities, particularly with regard to pay gaps and women's participation in the labour market. Career choice, social background and company conditions limit the scope for real action here – a circumstance that underlines the need for institutional change (see Gildemeister 2013). This is clear from statements that emphasise situational negotiation processes, as in the following example:

"*I think there are many important factors. If the father has a physically demanding job, I think he deserves at least an hour's break. It depends on how the children allow him to*

*always recover physically. If he is not fit, he cannot take proper care of the children* (...) *However, if he comes home after a long day and is physically exhausted and sees that the mother is simply at the end of her tether, then he has to take a step back and take the children. So I don't think you can generalise like that, it depends on the situation* (...) *It's important to talk about it. He comes home and you say, 'How was your day? Is everything okay? I need to sit down for fifteen minutes with a cup of coffee. I'm exhausted.' That was fine for me.*"

(43 JS, female, 35)

The quote illustrates how partnerships organise care and housework depending on how tired they are, how they feel on a particular day, and how they communicate with each other. Nevertheless, the division of labour in such models remains strongly linked to individual workloads and is not systematically linked to structural gender equality goals.

Another statement illustrates an attitude that seeks to organise care and housework primarily according to individual needs and preferences. A strict equal distribution is explicitly rejected; instead, the division should be flexible and based on individual preferences.

"*Care work and housework should be organised according to needs. I'm not advocating that everyone has to do everything, but in a relationship, you can definitely divide things up according to your preferences.*"

(03 VS, female, 38)

Although this model can enable gender-equitable arrangements, it carries the risk of perpetuating existing gender roles without reflection if preferences are, as is often the case, shaped by social and economic structures (cf. West & Zimmerman 1987; Gildemeister 2013). The statement avoids addressing structural factors such as wage differences, labour market conditions or institutional frameworks, thus remaining at the micro level of individual negotiation. A focus on equality is not ruled out, but is linked to individual preferences, the conditions under which these preferences arise may themselves be shaped by gender-specific inequalities.

In some statements, the organisation of care work is not primarily justified by principles of equality or fairness, but by supposed personal aptitude. It is argued that the person who can "better" care for a newborn or develop a stronger bond should stay at home. In some cases, this argument is implicit, in others – as in the present example – it is explicit with reference to the role of the mother: "*There is this tension again between (...) attitude, ideology and biology and society* (...) *In the first year of life, the baby needs its mother a lot*" *(24 JS, female, 56)*. This statement combines individual assessment with a biologising framework by positioning the mother as the natural primary caregiver for the child. This shifts the justification for the division of labour from a partnership-based negotiation to an essentialist logic that uses biological- al differences as an argument. Through naturalised attributions, social and cultural influences on attachment and care practices recede into the background in favour of a biologically deterministic view (cf. Klinger 2010; West & Zimmerman 1987). This legitimises and stabilises the social division of labour between the sexes, even if it is formulated as being based on "suitability".

Some propose a rotating model in which parents divide their paid work and care work into shorter intervals, for example, by alternating every three or four months. It is assumed that this could minimise the negative professional effects for both genders while still allowing them to maintain close bonds with their children.

> *"What I also think is great is that you don't always have to commit to childcare arrangements for a whole year, but can say, for example, that one person stays at home for the first three or four months and then you switch every three or four months. That way, you're not away from work for so long. The children still have both parents and you have a break in between, when one phase is over, before you start the next one. And then the partner does the next one, or something like that. So I don't understand why everything always has to be fixed for three years or one year."*
>
> (03 VS, female, 38)

*Scepticism towards egalitarian division of labour*

A few interviewees expressed criticism of the ideal of complete equality. Practical obstacles – such as restrictive employer cultures, social expectations or professional stigmatisation of men who take on caring roles – are cited as key barriers. These statements point to the relevance of gender-coded institutions (cf. Acker 1991, 1992, 2006), in which a focus on gainful employment remains entrenched as the male norm.

> *"And I think it's good that there are legal regulations now. Paternity leave, etc., that's really good. But I still have to look at my own situation. A family has to be able to live. And most of the time, when the breadwinner is the father, because he earns more. It's just difficult. And unfortunately, there are also a lot of employers where fathers are always indispensable. And in the culture of employers, it has to change in their minds first."*
>
> (35 OP, female, 61)

> *"But I just don't know what happens when you try to strike a balance. Or you say 50/50, because I've found that as soon as we were out of balance and I was in the weaker position, it worked with my ex. But as soon as I turned it around a bit, it didn't work anymore because he no longer fit the typical image of a man in society (...) I don't know if it's that easy to implement. People say 50:50. But what does that do to the man when he's in that weaker position? What does that do to him? How is he seen by others? From the outside? (...) They'll say, 'Hey, what's wrong with you? Are you letting yourself be pushed around?'"*
>
> (05 VS, female, 33)

The two quotes illustrate different facets of scepticism towards a complete equal distribution of paid work and care work.

In the first quote, gender and economic structures are directly linked: the man is the "breadwinner" because he "just earns more". Here, gender-specific wage differences overlap with employment biographies that are shaped by career choices, access to education and labour market segregation. The reference to restrictive employer cultures also shows how gendered

institutions (cf. Acker 1991, 1992, 2006) privilege male full-time employment and sanction care work by men. This effect can be even more pronounced for men from lower-income, less protected employment segments, where adjustments to working hours or care leave often pose an existential risk.

The second quote highlights the axis of gender in connection with social perception and symbolic status. The experience described that relationship balance only worked under the condition of a "weaker position" for women, illustrates how strongly male identity is defined by economic and power-related superiority. The anticipated social sanction ("Let yourself be pushed around?") refers to a peer and community level where deviations from hegemonic masculinity norms are evaluated not only individually but also collectively. Such attributions can be reinforced by further lines of difference – such as age, regional milieus or cultural contexts of origin in which gender-specific role expectations are particularly rigidly entrenched.

From an intersectional perspective, both examples show that egalitarian division of labour can fail not only because of gender, but also because of the overlap between gender, economic class, institutional structures and cultural norms. This multidimensionality makes it clear that political and corporate equality strategies cannot be one-dimensional, but must simultaneously address economic security, corporate cultural change and the deconstruction of social status norms centred on male employment.

Overall, the statements show that scepticism towards egalitarian division of labour is not necessarily based on a rejection of gender equality ideals, but often on the perception of structural and cultural barriers. These act as a double barrier: economically and institutionally through unequal incomes and workplace presence norms, and socio-culturally through stigmatisation and loss of status for male care work.

### C) On the relevance of economic factors: structural conditions as a limiting force

A central theme in the interviews is the economic determinism of gender-based division of labour. The gender pay gap is not only recognised as a structural problem but is also described as a direct factor influencing private care decisions. Women* with lower incomes are more likely to take on unpaid care work, which results in long-term economic disadvantage – for example, in terms of poverty in old age or financial dependence.

Some respondents advocate measures such as automated pension splitting, mandatory paternity leave or an unconditional basic income for care work. These demands draw on concepts of redistribution and recognition (cf. Fraser 2003) and address the need for a society-wide reassessment of unpaid reproductive work.

### D) Critical reflections on social developments: gender beyond binary thinking – gaps, impetus and structural limitations

The qualitative interviews mainly revolve around a binary gender order in which "man" and "woman" function as central reference categories. The dominant narratives refer to heterosexual couple relationships with children and deal with questions of the division of paid work and

care work primarily within this constellation. Non-binary, transgender or queer perspectives remain largely unmentioned in the statements – a finding that points to a central gap in the current social discourse, as well as in family policy structures.

*Gender is thought of in binary terms: heteronormative reference points as the norm*

The majority of interviews reflect a normative orientation towards a heteronormative family model. Ideas about gender roles, responsibilities and compatibility issues are generally linked to the classic two-parent model with a gender-differentiated division of labour. This is evident both in explicit statements and in the implicit structure of the narratives.

Despite the dominance of binary gender categories, however, some contributions reveal the beginnings of a critical and reflective attitude. For example, some interviewees express a desire to question traditional expectations of gender-specific responsibilities, such as with regard to parental leave or gainful employment:

> *So the division between men and women cannot simply be pigeonholed, but rather that everyone can do everything and should do everything in the way that suits them best. And so that no one feels forced into a pigeonhole, into a gender.*"
>
> (21 JS, female, 29)

Such statements mark the first steps towards a decategorised, diversity-sensitive understanding of gender.

*Invisibility and exclusion: same-sex parenting in the shadow of the two-parent model*

Same-sex couples are only mentioned sporadically in the interviews, mainly in connection with structural exclusion and discrimination in family policy. In particular, reference is made to legal hurdles to adoption and the continuing orientation of family policy benefits towards the heterosexual two-parent model.

> "*So for them, it's always* (...) *Austria is so good for families, and I don't know, I think for things that we saw as alternative families, where you're not married and man, woman, or whatever, there are still a lot of big hurdles when it comes to adopting children from your partner in same-sex couples.*"
>
> (21 JS, female, 29)

Despite legal progress in adoption law, according to the interviewee, same-sex couples continue to face institutional barriers. At the same time, there is criticism that numerous support measures for families are still tailored to the traditional "man + woman + child" model. The legal regulation of parental leave and parental leave is also described as heteronormative-coded: Same-sex couples encounter structural hurdles here, for example in the allocation of parental leave entitlements or access to family policy benefits. The interviews thus point to the

normative effect of so-called *gendered institutions*[12] (cf. Acker, 1991, 1992, 2006), which structurally restrict gender and family diversity.

In addition to the legal framework, the interviews also address socio-economic and cultural barriers faced by non-traditional family models. Several interviewees point to the precarious institutional and social support for care arrangements outside the heteronormative mainstream. For example, it is noted that even heterosexual men face considerable hurdles if they want to take longer periods of parental leave – and this is even more difficult for families with two fathers.

The analysis makes it clear that same-sex parenting is caught between several overlapping dimensions of inequality. Legal restrictions – for example, on adoption or the allocation of parental leave entitlements – interact with socio-economic factors such as income differences and precarious employment conditions, which make it difficult to achieve egalitarian care arrangements. Added to this is the normative power of heteronormative models, which are perpetuated in family policy measures and company regulations, thereby stabilising not only legal but also cultural exclusions. From an intersectional perspective, it becomes clear that discrimination does not only operate at the level of sexual and gender diversity, but also interacts with gender, class and institutional structures. A sustainable equality policy must therefore address legal equality, economic security and the deconstruction of heteronormative norms in equal measure in order to enable and stabilise care arrangements beyond the two-parent standard in the long term (cf. Crenshaw 1989; Lutz, Herrera Vivar & Supik 2013).

*Symbolic impulses for a more inclusive gender discourse*

Individual interview statements point to symbolically relevant impulses for a more open approach to gender. For example, the term "paternity leave" is criticised as normative because it implies a gender-stereotypical idea of responsibility. Instead, interviewees advocate gender-neutral language, such as using the term "parental leave" regardless of gender:

> "*And so it's no longer called 'daddy month' or 'paternity leave', but simply 'parental leave'. It's parental leave like any other. You don't need to call it 'paternity leave' or 'daddy month' or whatever.*"
>
> (21 JS, female, 29)

Such linguistic and symbolic interventions mark the beginning of a discursive shift towards *gender diversity* (cf. Villa 2012; Hirschauer 2014). They show that social change is driven not only by structural reforms, but also by linguistic and cultural practices. It should be noted, however, that many gender equality programmes and academic debates deliberately use the term "paternity leave" to promote the e visibility and dissemination of paternal care work; using

[12] *Gendered institutions,* a concept developed by US sociologist Joan Acker, describes how social institutions are structurally permeated by gender – in other words, how gender relations are embedded in their organisation, functional logic and practices. Parental leave models that implicitly assume a heterosexual two-parent model are considered an expression of *gendered institutions*.

the more neutral term "parental leave" may seem more inclusive, but it can also obscure the fact that care work continues to be performed primarily by women*.

### E) Tension between ideals and reality

The interviews clearly show that there is no single model for a fair division of labour. While many respondents consider a 50:50 split to be ideal, most are aware that structural, economic and social factors often make equal distribution difficult.

There is a tension between individual desires and societal conditions: while some prefer a division that is as flexible and needs-based as possible, others argue that true equality can hardly be achieved without structural changes.

It is particularly clear that a gender-equitable division of paid and unpaid work is not only a private decision but is also significantly influenced by political and economic structures. In order to achieve greater equality in the long term, deeply rooted norms, economic inequalities and cultural expectations must be questioned and changed.

Although the majority of statements focus on heteronormative family models, there are some reflections on the need for a more diverse view of gender and family forms. Same-sex couples are occasionally mentioned, but more in the context of legal or financial challenges. Non-binary or trans people are not explicitly mentioned in the interviews. The interviews show that the social debate on gender equality is still strongly centred on binary gender categories and heteronormative family models. At the same time, however, there are initial signs of a more critical examination of these structures and calls for greater flexibility for alternative family forms.

### Conclusion: Between structure, norm and negotiation

The evaluation of the quantitative and qualitative data clearly shows that ideas about gender roles, care responsibilities and family organisation oscillate between affirmative reproduction and critical reflection. A majority of respondents are in favour of equality and against traditional role attributions – at the same time, heteronormative family models and binary gender concepts remain implicitly or explicitly dominant in many statements. The normative power of gender-coded institutions continues to have an effect even where individual attitudes appear progressive.

The interviews reveal different ways of dealing with structural inequalities: some arrangements are based on pragmatic considerations, while others reflect deeply entrenched ideals. Economic factors – especially income levels – act as key determinants of gender-based division of labour and make it difficult to implement egalitarian ideals. At the same time, individual statements reveal signs of cultural change, such as the questioning of gender-specific parental leave regulations or the demand for linguistic and institutional openness.

Particularly striking is the limited visibility of non-binary identities and queer family forms: they remain largely invisible in the discourse or are discussed as exceptions. This points to the

structural limitations of social recognition beyond binary and heteronormative patterns – a finding that underscores the need for political and discursive expansion.

Overall, it is clear that gender relations in the family context are not static, but rather the subject of ongoing negotiations between normative expectations, structural conditions and individual opportunities for shaping one's life. A gender-equal society requires not only changes in political and economic structures, but also a profound transformation of cultural norms.

## 3.2. Care work in the family of origin: between everyday invisibility and remembered exception – a classification

Care work – understood as the social practice of caring for and reproducing everyday life – is a central locus of gendered division of labour. The GEQ-AT study shows that care work is not only mostly unevenly distributed but also remains deeply embedded in cultural patterns of interpretation, family socialisation and subjective positioning. This chapter examines how care practices are structured along gender lines in families of origin, how they are remembered, justified or criticised by the respondents, and what potential for transformation this offers.

The starting point is the observation that care work has historically and currently been performed primarily by women. This pattern is evident in the biographical memories of the interviewees about their families of origin as well as in the quantitative findings of the GEQ-AT study. Habitual dispositions, normative models and structural conditions interact to stabilise certain forms of gender differentiation in care work – in the sense of what Bourdieu (1997) has termed symbolic violence and Connell has termed hegemonic gender order (cf. Connell & Messerschmidt 2005).

At the same time, there are signs of ruptures, negotiations and reorientations: particularly female* respondents reflected on their social role, formulated demands on partnerships and criticised the invisibility of care work. At the same time, it is becoming clear that men* are increasingly taking on care work, but are caught between participation, the role of helper and performative equality. This picture is complemented by the role of generational caregivers – especially mothers and mothers-in-law – who, as intergenerational actors, contribute to both stabilising and changing gender order.

The chapter focuses on the division of care work in the family of origin and differentiates between groups of actors (women, men, grandparents) and generates analytical categories (habitus, mental load, caring masculinities, intersectionality) in order to highlight the complexity of gendered care arrangements from an everyday perspective.

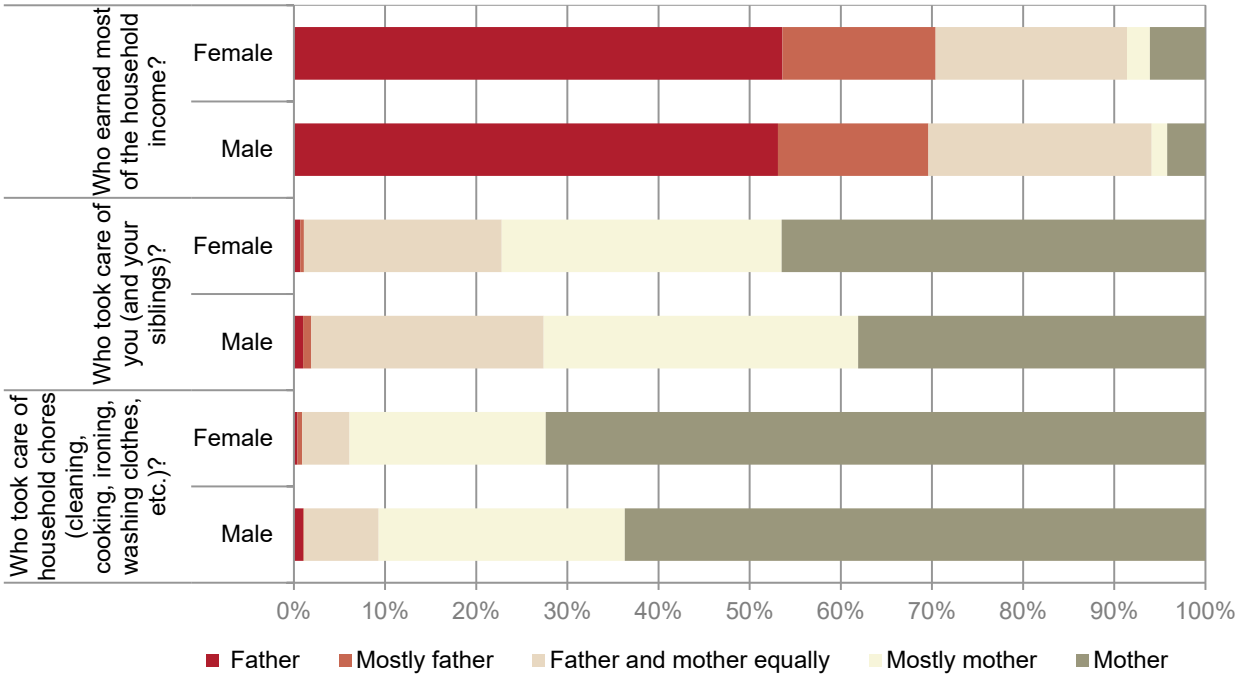
### Quantitative findings on care work in the family of origin

Based on the quantitative findings of the GEQ-At study, gender-specific patterns of inequality in the division of care work are evident in the family of origin. According to the respondents, mothers were primarily responsible for housework such as cooking, cleaning, ironing and laundry. Similarly, the main responsibility for childcare lays predominantly with women, although

initial trends towards a more balanced distribution between women and men are already emerging. The father was usually responsible for providing for the family financially.

It is interesting to note that, looking back, men* describe the division of tasks as more balanced, while women* emphasise more strongly that mothers did the majority of care work – even if these differences are not statistically significant.

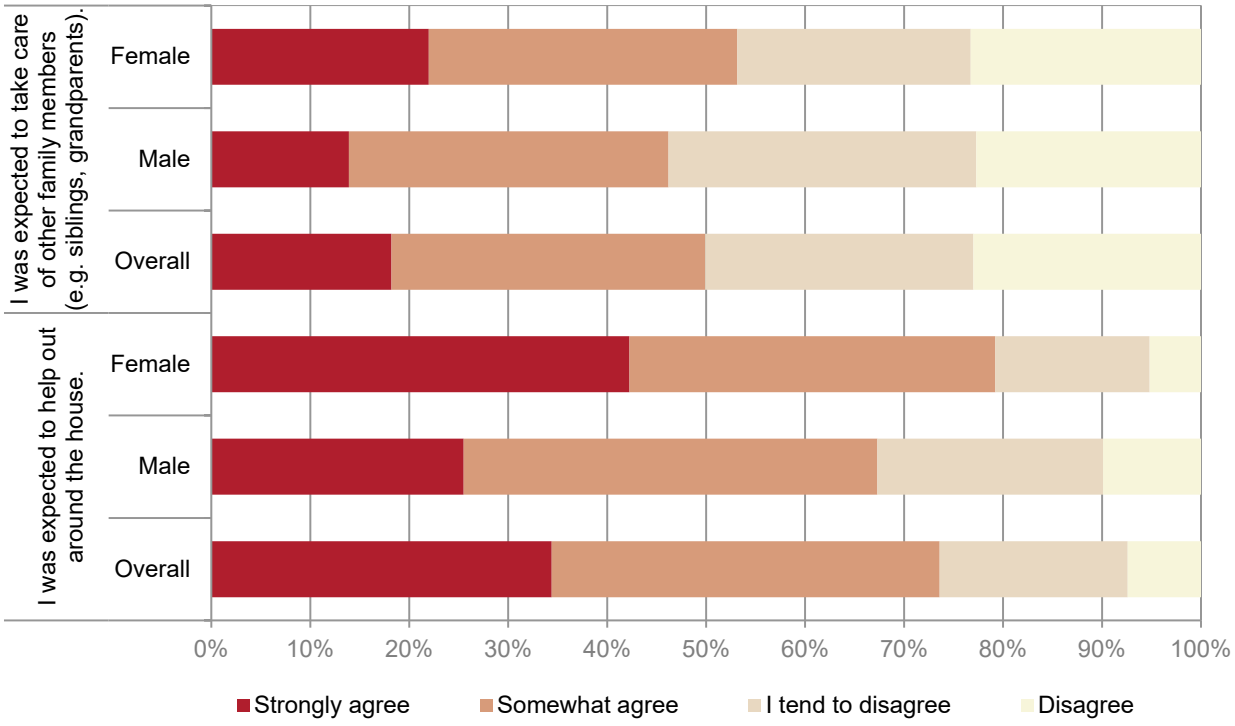
**Figure7: Division of labour in the family of origin (childhood), by gender**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=2,295, n miss between 59 and 129, weighted sample; values below 3% not shown for better clarity.

It is also clear that male children were less likely to be expected to participate in housework or childcare tasks.

**Figure8: Participation in household and care responsibilities (childhood), by gender**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=2,295, n miss=150 and 58, weighted sample.

## Qualitative findings on care work in the family of origin

### Symbolic exceptions and structural burdens: Gender-differentiated care arrangements in biographical retrospect

The qualitative analysis of the interviews reveals a structurally gendered organisation of parental care work in the respondents' families of origin, which is based on a deeply entrenched cultural matrix of gender-based division of labour. In the vast majority of cases, everyday care work (housework, childcare and the organisation of everyday family life) was primarily performed by the mothers. This unequal distribution was not explicitly problematised within family practice but was experienced as self-evident and habitually "normal".

Following Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, it can be argued that these gender-specific patterns of behaviour were effective in the sense of incorporated social knowledge – as an "unspoken attitude" that is reproduced unreflectively and permanently (cf. Bourdieu 1987):

> *"And that's just a kind of unspoken attitude that you pick up as a young girl, like, 'aha, okay, I'll marry a man, the man will go to work and then I'll have children, and I'll stay at home for the children.'"*
>
> (21 JS, female, 29)

The interviews broadly support this assessment. In numerous narratives, the mother appears as the primary, often sole care provider, even if she was also working at the same time:

"[She] *worked just as much, sometimes even more than my father, and then she also took care of the entire household and basically raised all the children, and I thought that was unfair.*"

(48 JS, female, 55)

These constellations were not only perceived as unfair, but often also understood as an expression of structural overload – especially when female paid work collided with care work. Care became a biographical burden, the consequences of which were reflected in fragmented employment histories, limited self-fulfilment and frustration (cf. Fraser 1994).

### Everyday invisibility – symbolic exceptions

A central analytical moment is the concept of *mental load*, which feminist theories use to explain the unequal distribution of responsibility (cf. Tronto 1993; Hochschild 1989). According to this concept, mental and emotional planning skills remain the preserve of women, even if men make occasional contributions. Male care work thus appears in the narrative as an exception, often exaggerated and emotionally positive:

"*So* [note: in everyday life] *Mum was there more. For example, when it came to cooking or being there after school. But Tuesday was always Dad's day* (...) *every Tuesday Mum had a long day at work and Dad looked after me. And that was actually always my favourite day of the week* (...) *because in the evening we always made something that I'm never allowed to have otherwise, like poppy seed noodles or* ' [a type of sweet pastry] *or something sweet. And I'm never allowed to have that otherwise. And then we danced and did whatever during dinner. Mum never allowed that. Exactly.*"

(13 VS, non-binary, 20)

This cultural exaggeration of episodic paternal presence contrasts with the invisible, constant work of women* – a phenomenon that can also be linked to Connell's theory *of hegemonic masculinity* (cf. Connell 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005). Here, power is not manifested in the direct devaluation of female care work, but in its implicit devaluation through absence – and the simultaneous valorisation of male exceptional acts. This quote also contrasts the fun, eventful and pleasant atmosphere of paternal care work, in which anything seems possible, with the care work of the mother, which is clearly more restrictive.

Even when men take on care tasks, they often do so in a self-referential way that affirms social expectations:

"*So now it's just that he's really proud that he's a totally progressive man* (...) *and actually knows where the dishwasher is.*"

(03 VS, female, 38)

Fathers who take on care tasks on an ad hoc basis often see themselves as modern and progressive – even though the basic distribution of burdens remains unchanged. These constellations are an expression of a gender-hierarchical discourse that devalues female care work by marking it as self-evident and male care work as special.

### Intergenerational patterns: grandmothers, daughters, sibling inequality

In an extension of the dyadic parenting model, grandmothers often take on the role of additional care providers. This intergenerational dimension points to the relevance of social networks – and to strategies of family compensation for structural overload. In this way, care work is functionally outsourced but remains within the female domain:

> "*My parents both went to work. Okay. And then it was the case that my grandmother always cooked for us* (...) *Yes, and that was also the reason why my parents put up with everything, because childcare was always there.*"
>
> (45 JS, female, 41)

At the same time, many stories reveal an early gender-differentiated allocation of responsibilities among siblings. Daughters in particular were more heavily involved in domestic tasks:

> "*Well, we didn't have to do anything, us kids. We just helped out. I can remember. My brother and I helped equally when we were younger. Later, he stopped doing it. I just took things off her now and then because I felt sorry for her somehow (...) Yes, well, as I said, my brother withdrew (...) Now I think that's a typical gender role model. The woman does everything, the man lets himself be served, and I think to myself, 'Oh God, how awful!'*"
>
> (56 VS, female, 30)

The experiences described illustrate how care work in the extended family context is often organised intergenerationally and at the same time reproduced along gender lines. Grandmothers take on central roles as additional care providers, which on the one hand underlines the importance of social networks for the organisation of everyday life, but on the other hand also points to compensatory strategies that families use to cushion structural overload. Despite being outsourced, care work thus remains anchored in the female-connoted sphere of responsibility. At the same time, the narratives reveal an early gender-differentiated allocation of responsibilities within sibling relationships: while an egalitarian division of labour is remembered from childhood, this shifts in adolescence in favour of the brothers, who withdraw from domestic work, while daughters take on responsibility. These biographically anchored patterns are an expression of the long-term reproduction of gender-based responsibilities as described in the concept of *doing gender* (cf. West & Zimmerman 1987). Gender is not only constructed and stabilised in symbolic attributions, but also in everyday practices – across generations.

### Resistance and reflection

However, the interviews reveal not only reproduction, but also reflection and resistance to habitualised gender relations. Explicit statements articulate the breaking down of traditional patterns – often with irony or open rejection:

> "*Yes, I strongly reject the way my mother lived. Yes, I always said that just because I don't have a penis, I have to cook all the time. A penis isn't for washing dishes or cooking.* (...) *Exactly.*"
>
> (24 JS, female, 56)

Such resistance points to a growing awareness of structural inequalities and the potential for reflective engagement with internalised role models (cf. Bourdieu 2005).

Analyses of the interviews clearly shows that parental care work was largely associated with women* in the biographical memories of the respondents. This gender-specific attribution was not only functional but also deeply rooted in culture – as part of everyday knowledge that manifests itself in family habits, emotional patterns of interpretation and conventions of memory. At the same time, cracks in the order emerge in the biographical reflections: moments of critical distance, humorous counter-speech or structural analysis. These "breaks" are an expression of irritation with gender orders that have been internalised as self-evident. They can be read as the first steps in a conscious deconstruction, in which everyday routines and attributions are not only questioned but, in some cases, redefined or reversed. In such moments, habitual knowledge becomes fragile – and opens up spaces for alternative courses of action. These cracks are not necessarily permanent or comprehensive, but often arise situationally, during periods of biographical upheaval or in retrospect of formative experiences. However, it is precisely their incompleteness and ambivalence that point to their potential to set deeply entrenched gender relations in motion – as conflictual, multidimensional and non-linear processes of negotiation and change.

## 3.3 Partnership today: division of labour, decisions and resources

While Chapter 3.2 examined the retrospective perception of care work provision and labour division within the family of origin, this chapter shifts the focus to current partnerships (or the most recent partnership). In addition to reflecting on the (partnership-based) division of care work based on the quantitative and qualitative survey and the literature review, the focus is on the division of paid work and thus financial resources. As a third dimension through which gender equality can be understood, the question of decision-making in families and partnerships is reflected upon. Sections 3.3.4 and 3.3.5 use quantitative and qualitative analysis to illustrate the interconnection between the three dimensions and discuss the relationships between them.

### 3.3.1. The unequal distribution of care work: A persistent pattern despite partial progress

Building on the previous reflection on care work in the family of origin, the focus of this section is on patterns of division of labour within the current partnership – including the participant's own actions, their partner's and the patterns of division of care labour. This analysis allows insights on the embeddedness of one's own care arrangements in family development lines and normative systems. Social conditions can support both, explicitly gender-equality-oriented and traditional patterns of division of labour. From a societal perspective, gender-equality-oriented patterns of division of care and housework remain the exception rather than the rule.

The latest time use study – conducted by Statistics Austria in 2021/22 – provides Austria-wide figures on the division of paid and unpaid work between women and men, as well as the division between care work, housework, paid work, time spent on voluntary activities, leisure time and personal regeneration (cf. Statistics Austria 2023). Women* and girls* spend an average of 3 hours and 37 minutes on care work in the household and family, while men* and boys* spend 2 hours and 6 minutes (cf. Statistics Austria 2023, p. 39). Looking at couple households, it is evident that women* do a higher proportion of housework regardless of their level of employment. However, the higher the proportion of paid work, the smaller the surplus of unpaid work. But even women* who do more paid work than their partners take on slightly more housework on average: in these constellations, the proportion of housework done by women* is 50.6%. If the level of employment is the same for couples, women* perform an average of 64.0% of the housework. This share rises to an average of 69.3% when women* have a lower level of employment than their partners (cf. ibid., p. 95).

When analysing childcare in couple households with children, the unequal distribution is particularly striking. On average, women* perform 67.2% of childcare. This gender-related inequality is independent of household income and the financial contribution of both partners to the household income. Even when the extent of employment is taken into account, the picture remains unchanged. With the same level of employment, women* perform 63.8% of childcare

and men* 36.2%. Even when women* have a higher level of employment than men*, women* take on more than half of childcare (cf. ibid., p. 110). Looking at "child-related" activities in couple families, it becomes apparent that women* are always or "normally" responsible for dressing, caring for sick children or helping with homework, while activities such as putting children to bed or playing are most often shared equally by both parents (cf. Statistics Austria 2023). The so-called re-entry monitoring by the Vienna Chamber of Labour reveals another facet: men* still rarely interrupt their careers to engage in care work for young children. Only 2 out of 10 men* participate in childcare and receive childcare allowance[13]. Of those who receive childcare allowance, the majority do so for only a short period of time; around 80 percent of men* interrupt their employment for less than 3 months (cf. Riesenfelder & Danzer 2024).

The findings of the GEQ-AT study on this topic are presented below drawing on quantitative and qualitative results. They reflect the patterns laid out in existing literature, but allow for different or more detailed insights based on our survey instrument and qualitative data accouting for a more differentiated examination of everyday practices, patterns of persistence and social change.

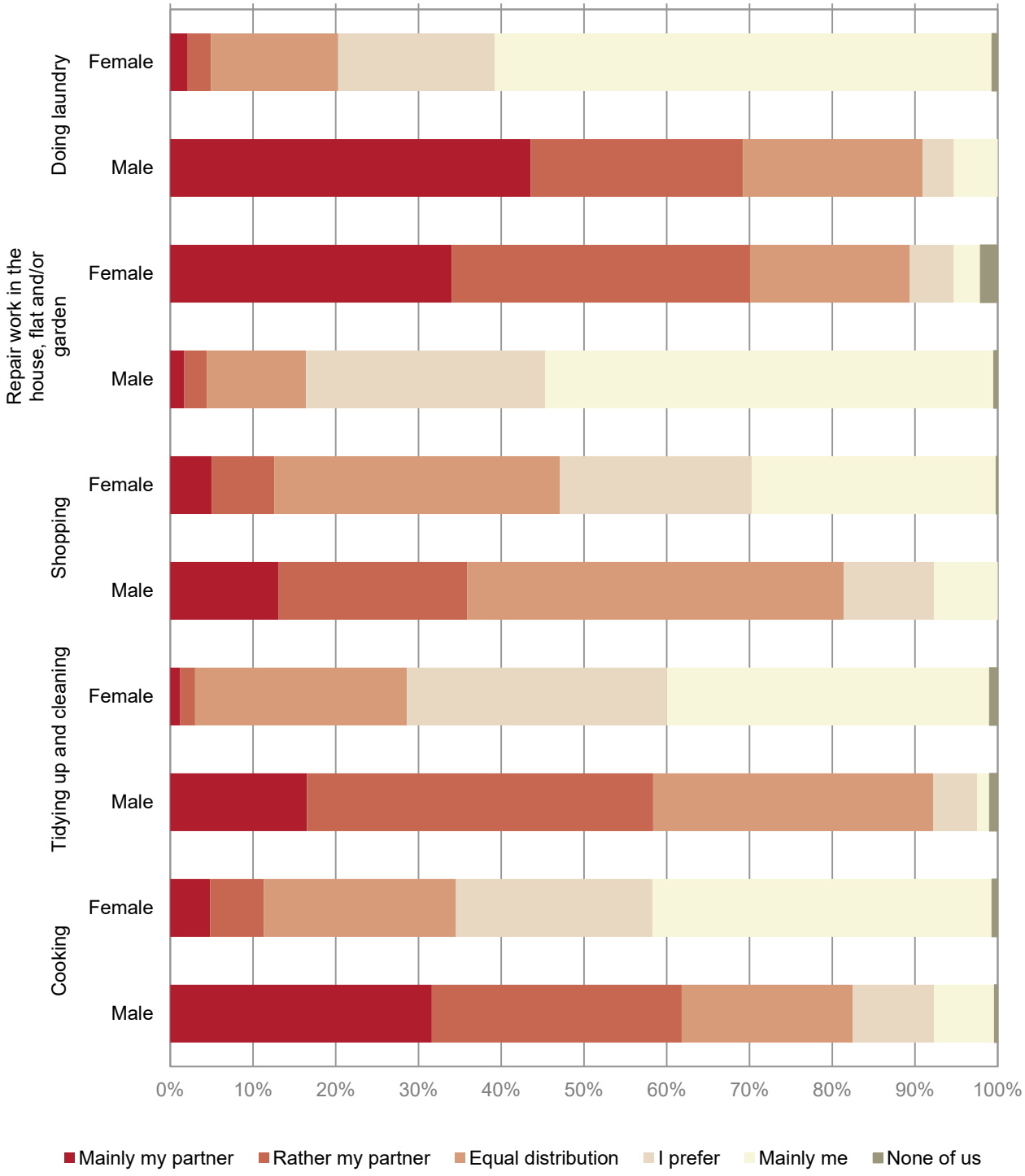
### Quantitative findings on the distribution of care work in the current situation

Despite widespread support for gender equality and rejection of stereotypical role models, there is a clear discrepancy in everyday practice: the division of paid and unpaid work within partnerships in Austria still largely follows traditional gender patterns. Although there are hardly any differences between the sexes in terms of labour force participation, there are significant differences in the amount of time spent in paid work: more than half of male respondents say they work more hours than their partners. Conversely, many women report that they work fewer hours, with the result that men are significantly more likely to work more than 40 hours per week, while women are disproportionately likely to work between 21 and 30 hours (see section 3.3.2.).

This unequal distribution is also reflected in unpaid care work. The everyday division of tasks within households remains strongly gendered: women* continue to take on the majority of tasks such as laundry, shopping, cooking and cleaning, while men* are more often responsible for repairs and gardening. Only 16% of respondents report an equal distribution of household tasks.

[13] In Austria, childcare allowance (Kinderbetreuungsgeld) is a state benefit that parents can receive during parental leave (Elternkarenz). While parental leave refers to the legal right to take time off from work to care for a child, childcare allowance is the financial support paid by the state during this period.

**Figure9: Distribution of unpaid domestic work in partnerships, by gender**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,597, n miss=90 and 99, weighted sample; values below 3% not shown for better clarity.

The gender-specific differences are evident not only in the actual distribution, but also in perceptions: while 75% of women* say they (tend to) take on household tasks themselves, 62% of men* say they (tend not to) take on these tasks themselves.

As other studies have shown (cf. Statistik Austria 2023b; Mayrhuber et al. 2024), a key turning point in the division of labour is the birth of the first child: while a quarter of childless couples say they share household tasks equally, this proportion drops to just 14% among couples with children. The assumption of care work and the restriction of gainful employment thus remain primarily female-coded – despite perhaps partly egalitarian convictions. This gap between attitudes and lived practice points to the powerful influence of structural conditions and deeply rooted cultural role expectations.

There are no differences in the division of household tasks according to the educational level of the respondents.

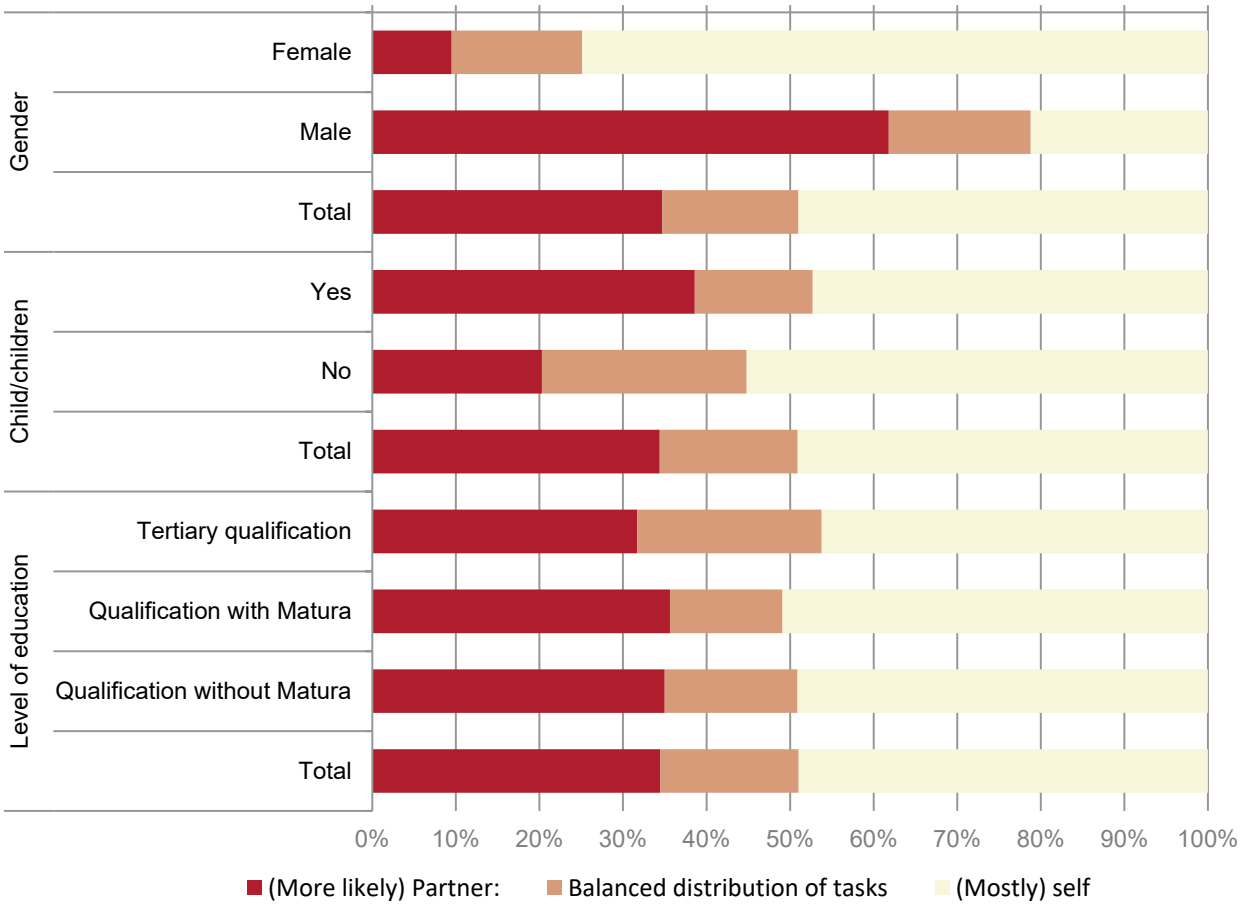


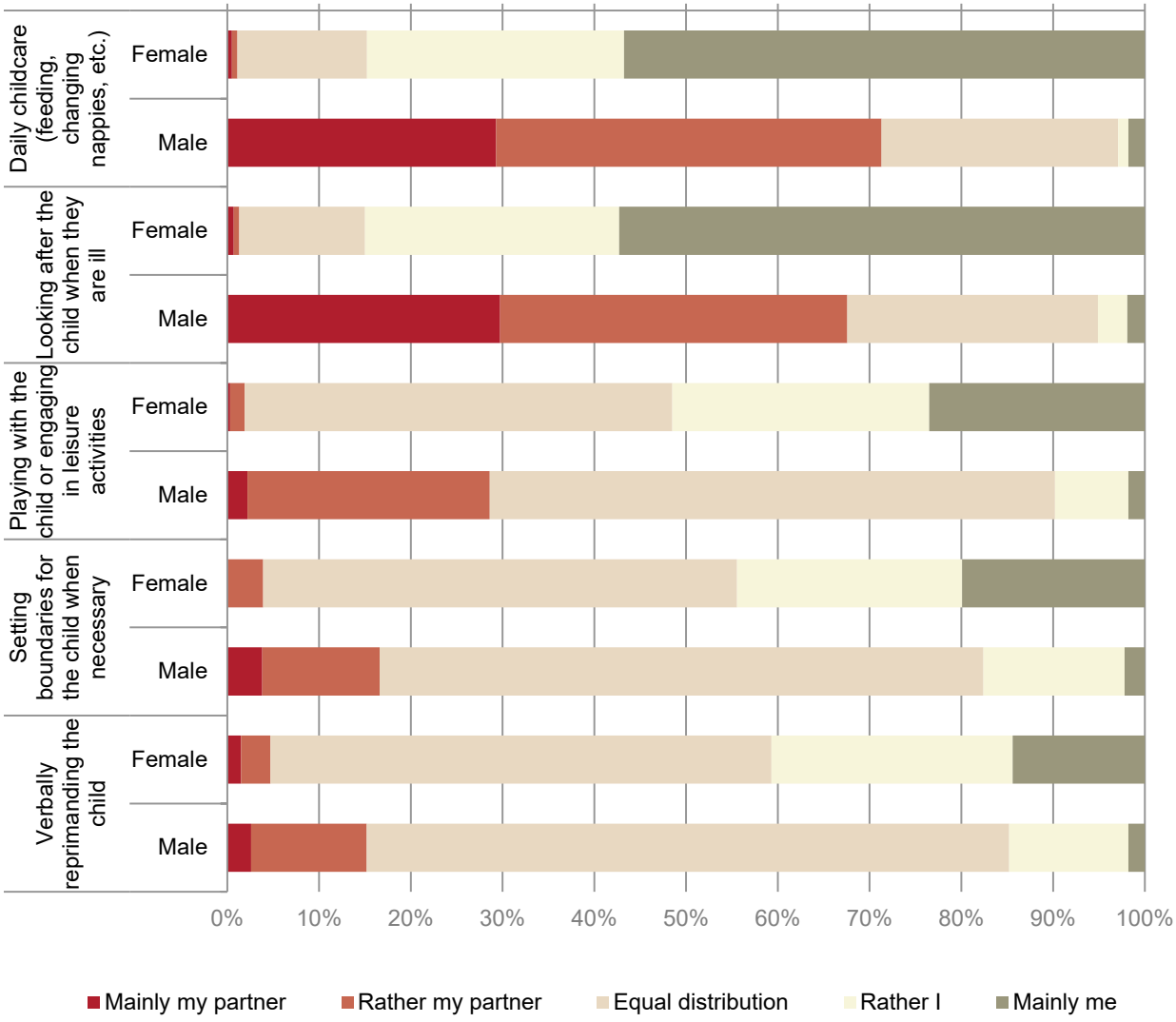

**Figure10: In partnerships and shared households: division of household tasks (index), by gender, child/children and level of education**

Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,597, n miss between 90 and 150, weighted sample.

Women* are more likely to take on childcare activities such as daily care tasks (feeding, changing nappies, etc.), looking after the child when they are ill, and playing with the child or engaging in leisure activities. Educational activities such as setting boundaries for the child when necessary and reprimanding them verbally are also more likely to be taken on by women*. However, it is apparent here that disciplining work is perceived as task that male respondents

tend to take on themselves or mainly take on themselves (around 16% and 14% respectively) or perceived as being divided equally between themselves and their partner. These findings apply to both women* and men*, although the latter more often perceive the division as being equal.

**Figure11: Distribution of childcare tasks by gender**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,429, n miss between 206 and 306, weighted sample; values below 3% not shown for better clarity .

In addition to gender, other differences can be observed along socio-economic characteristics: childcare tasks are more evenly distributed among couples living in larger cities (over 100,000 inhabitants) (24%) than in medium-sized to small towns (10%) and rural communities (10%). This difference is even more pronounced when broken down by gender: around 81% of female respondents living in rural communities say that they (tend to) take on the respective tasks themselves, as do 70% of those living in medium-sized to small towns, whereas "only" around 58% of women* living in large cities do such unpaid work. In addition, around 40% of male

respondents in large cities say they (tend to) take on these tasks themselves; in rural communities, the figure is only 14%.

Furthermore, differences emerge along the educational level, with a balanced division of tasks most frequently observed when respondents have a tertiary degree (20%). This applies to both female and male respondents.

## Qualitative findings on the distribution of care work in the current situation

### The role of women* in care work: differentiating positions and practices in the tension between normative orders and subjective negotiations

The qualitative analysis of the interview data points to a diverse spectrum of female positions in family care contexts. The practice of care work does not appear to be a homogeneous space of experience, but rather a complex field of subjective interpretations, normative attributions and structural conditions. The roles that women* assume in the organisation and performance of care work can be differentiated into different constellations that reveal various modes of reproduction, reflection and transformation of gender-specific division of labour.

#### *Natural Caregiver – the persistent narrative of female care*

A central interpretative pattern is represented by the figure of women as *natural caregivers*. The field of feminist economics (e.g. Fraser 2016, Federici, 2012) demonstrated that the construction of women* as "natural caregivers" is a central ideological basis for the separation of the spheres of gainful employment and reproduction – a separation that structurally leads to the economic devaluation and invisibility of care work, and thus women*.

In the interviews conducted for the GEQ-AT study, this narrative points to a deeply rooted assumption of female responsibility for care that is rarely questioned. Care tasks are taken on tacitly in accordance with the gender order – as an expression of symbolic violence that legitimises and naturalises existing inequalities.

> "*Very traditional. Ultra-conservative. My husband had a job. I wanted to stay with the children for the first few years, I have to say. I didn't want the children to be, well, I have to say, my parents-in-law are almost a different generation. He* [partner] *didn't want my children to be raised by their grandparents, and nursery school started at four in our country. And then I said, okay, I'll do it.*"
>
> (50 OP, female, 61)

In these narratives, care work is presented as a natural part of female identity. Women take on the main responsibility for childcare and household organisation – not only because it is expected of them, but also because they identify with it. At the same time, many report a certain inner emptiness or a desire for personal development:

> "(...) *I was very active with the children, but then I realised that something was missing* (...). *I needed something. And then it just happened* (...) *I got involved in the local community, in the parents' association, and became a cultural mediator.*"
>
> (50 OP, female, 61)

These statements show that care work is accepted but not necessarily experienced as fulfilling. Many women* seek parallel spaces for self-actualization – for example, in voluntary work or further education. Several interviewees talked about a subjective lack of agency, which they try

to counteract through voluntary work or educational activities. This tension simultaneously points to disruptions of internalised role patterns and opens up potential for individual reorientation.

### *Shapers of lived equality*

Another type that emerged from the data are women* who not only strive for a consciously equal division of care work with their partner, but also actively shape it.

Women* who fit this pattern live in partnerships in which equality is understood as an ongoing process of negotiation, supported by continuous communication, mutual recognition and a willingness to question existing routines. They are often well educated and work in professional positions that allow for flexibility in terms of time and organisation – structural conditions that favour egalitarian arrangements.

> *"So we both spent 20 hours in 2023 and divided the days* (...) *between us. It was a bit unusual, also in terms of work, because we actually worked two and a half days at a time* (...) *my partner worked all day Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday morning, and during that time I was with our child, and then I started work at 12:00 on Wednesday and worked all day Thursday and Friday. That was it.* (...) *It worked very well for us and was possible because of the nature of our office jobs. We divided the days between us, with one of us at the office and the other with the child. That takes a lot of stress out of it."*
>
> (33 OP, female, 35)

From a care ethics perspective in the sense of Joan Tronto (1993; 2013), these arrangements can be understood as a conscious practice of shared responsibility. Tronto (1993; 2013) emphasises that care should be understood not only as an activity, but also as an attitude that refers to mutual dependence, the assumption of responsibility and the equal value of care work and paid work. In this understanding, the partnerships described are examples of how these principles are translated into everyday life: care work is not seen as a secondary task for one person, but as a joint project for both partners. Women in egalitarian partnerships articulate a reflexive attitude towards traditional role attributions. Care work is understood here as an area of negotiation in which material resources (e.g. flexible working time models), educational level and normative beliefs intertwine. Equality does not appear to be an achieved reality, but rather a continuous process of cooperative coordination – an ideal that depends as much on structural enabling conditions as on habitualised equality orientation (cf. Jurczyk/Lange 2007).

### *Primary responsibility with selective support*

This model describes constellations in which women* bear the brunt of care work while also having central responsibility for organisation, planning and emotional coordination. Analytically, this constellation can be clearly located within the mental load concept (Daminger 2019). Mental load describes the invisible cognitive and emotional work that is necessary to organise family life smoothly. In this model, this burden remains largely with women*, while men* contribute selectively to its execution. Although this provides short-term relief, it does not fundamentally change the structural inequality in the distribution of responsibilities. Rather, this form

of division of labour stabilises existing gender norms by maintaining the female connotation of planning and control skills.

> *"It's mainly the mental workload. I do the mental management, so to speak. It's no problem to say, 'Please do that' or 'Make sure that happens' or 'Take care of that'. But yes, remembering that it needs to be done is definitely my job.* (...)"

(51 OP, female, 46)

> *"And then at some point we started hearing about this mental load concept and I said, 'Yes, that's it.' I felt so understood at that moment because I thought, finally, now I understand why it is like this. Yes, um, and that's just the classic scenario. So basically, you do things and get things done, but it's the classic 'he helps' scenario. He supports the idea, but he doesn't really take responsibility. Mhm. And that's actually what we're arguing about at the moment."*

(30 OP, female, 50)[14]

In the "primary responsibility with occasional support" constellation, the male partner (helper) takes on a reactive and execution-oriented role that clearly deviates from equal responsibility. His involvement is mainly on request and is therefore dependent on delegation: He takes action when specific tasks are assigned to him, but rarely acts on his own initiative. The tasks he takes on are usually clearly defined, time-limited and visible – such as preparing dinner, putting the child to bed or doing individual household chores. Strategic day-to-day management, forward planning, coordination and prioritisation, on the other hand, remain the responsibility of the primarily responsible partner.

> *"Well, except for some things, of course, where I thought to myself that he could have done that without me having to remind him. I always kept an eye on things to make sure everything was running smoothly, so to speak. That's how it was."*

(25 VS, female, 28)

This division of roles stabilises existing gender norms by continuing to associate organisation, emotional coordination and responsibility with women*, while limiting male involvement to clearly defined, visible actions. Although this form of support can provide short-term relief and signal a willingness to cooperate to the outside world, it does not change the structural inequality. Instead, the existing imbalance is concealed because the male helper's occasional contributions appear to be a sign of commitment, while the permanent and often invisible burden continues to fall on the female partner.

[14] The two interview excerpts exemplify how research and theory provide participants with a language to render their experiences visible and comprehensible. By drawing on the concept of mental load, they employ a notion that is firmly embedded in both scholarly and public debate, enabling them to articulate their situation with precision. This active use of a theoretical concept also points to a potential for social change at the micro level, as everyday burdens are not merely felt individually but become collectively articulated and thus negotiable.

*Pioneers of shared responsibility*

This type describes partnerships in which equality is not seen as a given status but as a process of development and negotiation. Women* in these relationships take on an active role as designers and initiators of changes in the division of labour. They act as educational "instructors" who actively demand and communicate equality in everyday life. They gradually encourage their partners to take on more responsibility by imparting knowledge, skills and routines in the area of care work.

> "(...) *although I feel that my boyfriend and I already have a relatively modern relationship* (...) *I still see role models in our relationship and that, above all, the intellectual work is very much up to me* (...) *I believe that my boyfriend and I will continue to develop, but that he also has some work to do. So I will try to encourage him to be more independent over the course of our relationship* (...) *sometimes it feels like* (...) *educating him* (...) *there is still room for improvement in terms of equality* (...) *in some cases, however, we still fall into the trap and it would be our goal to be as equal as possible in all areas, both financially and in terms of care work, i.e. decision-making* (...)"
>
> (59 OP, female, 27)

The quote illustrates that it is not just about the distribution of practical tasks, but also about cultural transformation work: pioneers question traditional gender roles, sensitise their partners to invisible responsibilities such as mental load, and gradually promote their ability to recognise needs independently and take responsibility. This process includes both practical guidance (e.g. introduction to specific task sequences) and implicit socialisation work (e.g. establishing new standards and expectations).

Although the goal of shared responsibility has not yet been achieved, these partnerships differ from stabilised unequal constellations: the distribution of responsibility is in flux, and a recognisable learning process is taking place. At the same time, this role continues to require increased cognitive and emotional effort from women, which goes beyond the actual care work and thus creates an additional mental load.

The key difference between "primary caregivers with occasional support" and "pioneers of shared responsibility" lies in the dynamics of the division of labour and the underlying potential for change. Primary responsibility refers to situations in which women permanently bear the main burden of both practical care work and invisible planning and coordination work (mental load). The male partner does participate, but mainly when asked and in the form of clearly defined, visible activities. Overall responsibility for the functioning of everyday life remains unchanged with women, resulting in the stable reproduction of traditional gender roles.

In contrast, female pioneers of shared responsibility are undergoing a recognisable process of transformation. Although they still bear the lion's share of the mental work and everyday organisation, they are actively pursuing the goal of gradually involving their partners in taking on full responsibility. This role is not only delegating, but also pedagogically and culturally transformative: it involves imparting knowledge, skills and routines in the area of care work, raising awareness of the mental load and encouraging independent assumption of

responsibility. The male partner shows at least some willingness to learn and gradually takes on tasks without having to be asked to do so.

While the division of labour among those primarily responsible remains structurally static and existing inequalities are stabilised, the trailblazer constellations show a shift in responsibility. However, this change is associated with increased cognitive and emotional effort on the part of women* that goes beyond the actual care work. Thus, the difference lies not only in the distribution of tasks, but above all in the question of whether the relationship constellation is geared towards maintaining or changing gender-specific patterns of division of labour.

*Mistrust-based primary responsibility*

Some interviews describe constellations in which women* bear the main burden of childcare and are unable to relinquish this responsibility completely despite their desire for relief, e.g. when biographical mistrust of men*'s care practices suggests continuous control and observation, as indicated in the following interview quote.

> *"And it's obvious that the children will stick to me anyway. That's not even something we think about. Of course, I'm 99% responsible. So, that's definitely something I've picked up. From my mother, too. Not this automatic, automatic response. I'm responsible for the children and it's true, I find it difficult not to be responsible and to hand over, because I notice that there is a mistrust of men with my history and I look closely at what happens and how you behave with the children."*
>
> (22 ES, female, 48)

This pattern can be described as an internalised primary responsibility for children with a pronounced dimension of control and mistrust. The interviewee described a deeply ingrained automatic response that takes her responsibility for the children for granted – "*99%*" – without this being actively reflected upon or negotiated. This matter-of-factness is shaped both by social role assignments and by her own socialisation, especially by her mother's example. Taking on this primary responsibility is not only socially structured but also emotionally anchored, which makes it difficult to delegate tasks.

This pattern is reinforced by a biographically based mistrust of male care practices. The interviewee described how she closely observes "*what happens and how you deal with the* children" when her partner is responsible. This attitude makes it difficult to hand over care tasks completely, even if there is a desire for relief. This creates an ambivalent dynamic: on the one hand, the goal is to share responsibility, but on the other hand, the need for control means that most of the practical and mental care work continues to fall to the mother. Overall, this shows how socially transmitted gender norms ("*mothers are primarily* responsible") and personal experiences interact to stabilise not only external structures but also internal dispositions that make it difficult to achieve an equal division of labour.

*Generational caregivers in care work: intergenerational ambivalences and intersectional interdependencies*

A key finding of the interview analysis is the importance of female role models from the same generation – especially mothers and mothers-in-law – for the establishment and reproduction of gender-based division of labour. These social actors not only provide practical support to young families but also act as normative authorities and cultural mediators of female role models. Their role is highly ambivalent and is framed in different ways depending on social class, education, migration history and generational affiliation – a constellation that requires an intersectional perspective (cf. Crenshaw 1989).

*Care networks and intergenerational relief*

In many families, mothers (in-law) take on a functional role as second-degree care providers. Especially in families with little institutional support or where parents have precarious employment, they ensure the compatibility of family and work. This reveals an intergenerational continuity of care in which female availability is taken for granted – often without social or financial recognition. These care relationships are particularly pronounced in migrant families, as formal support systems (e.g. through language or residence status) are more difficult to access. At the same time, a strong principle of intergenerational solidarity is often practised in these contexts, which is viewed positively from a cultural perspective.

*Normative continuities and biographical reproductions*

Many interviewees reported a more or less tacit transmission of traditional ideals of femininity and motherhood by their own mothers or mothers-in-law:

> *"Yes, I would have liked more support from my mother-in-law, because staying at home with the children was not a decision I made entirely on my own. There was simply no network for childcare, and she made it clear that she would not take the child or children, that it was my job, that I had to be at home* (...) *I would have liked more support. She was very critical, very Tyrolean. I don't know if that's a term (...) This mixture of cosmopolitanism and Alpine dumpling-eating, backstabbing ways of thinking* (...)".
>
> (45 JS, female, 41)

This passage shows how female caregivers from previous generations – in this case, the mother-in-law – play a dual role in the gender-based division of labour: on the one hand, as potential supporters in everyday family life (from the perspective of the interviewees), on the other hand as bearers and mediators of normative ideas about what "good motherhood" and "female responsibility" mean in care work. The quote from the interviewee illustrates the power of these normative instances: the mother-in-law not only refuses to provide active support, but also articulates the clear expectation that caring for the children is primarily the mother's responsibility. This expectation is not perceived as an individual point of view, but as an attitude

anchored in a specific cultural and regional context ("Tyrolean" as a mixture of cosmopolitanism and conservative mentality).[15]

The qualitative analysis makes it clear that normative ideas are strongly influenced by social milieus. In academic family milieus, equality is often formulated as an ideal of partnership, while in more traditional contexts, family stability and gender differences are considered values worth protecting. In rural families, families with low incomes and low levels of formal education, more rigid gender images tend to emerge, which do not necessarily prohibit women* from working, but structurally subordinate them. Paradoxically, it is precisely in these milieus that women*'s employment is often indispensable due to economic necessity – an area of tension that leads to negotiation processes and sometimes hidden conflicts between norms and practice.

The intergenerational transmission of role models by female role models is a central but ambivalent element in the reproduction of gender-based division of labour. Mothers- and/or mothers-in-law can play a supportive role, but at the same time they can also be normative and a source of conflict. Their impact does not unfold in isolation, but is structured by the intersections of social class, educational attainment, migration history and regional and cultural influences. An intersectional perspective is therefore essential to understand the complex interweaving of normative continuities and economic constraints in the organisation of family care.

### Masculinities in care work: differentiating current forms of participation between reproduction, reflection and transformation

The gendered division of unpaid care work is a central factor in the reproduction of social inequality (cf. Tronto 1993; Winker 2015). While feminist research has focused on the marginalisation of female care work for decades, male forms of participation have increasingly come to the fore in recent years (cf. Elliott 2016; Gärtner & Scambor, 2020; Scambor et al. 2014; Scambor & Holtermann, 2023). The qualitative analysis of the GEQ-AT interviews shows that care-related masculinity practices are by no means uniform. Rather, different forms of involvement can be identified that are complexly interwoven with economic, biographical and normative factors. Four central constellations emerge from the interviews in the GEQ-AT study: equal participation ("caring masculinities"), asymmetrical support roles ("helper masculinity"), situationally adapted roles ("hybrid model") and symbolically charged, temporary participation ("podium masculinity").

#### *"Caring masculinities": equal care work as everyday practice*

Some of the interviewees described men as actively involved in everyday care work – in the form of a balanced division of labour in the household, responsibility for children and shared mental load. These men do not see themselves as "helping" partners, but as equal actors in

[15] Tyrol (German: Tirol) is a federal province (Bundesland) in western Austria, located in the Alps and bordering Germany, Italy, and Switzerland. It is known for its mountainous landscape, tourism, and winter sports, with Innsbruck as its capital.

family care arrangements, and they are also described as such. Their practices reflect the concept of *caring masculinities* (Elliott 2016; Gärtner & Scambor, 2020; Scambor et al. 2014; Scambor & Holtermann, 2023), which recognises caring behaviour as part of male identity without reproducing hegemonic patterns of masculinity based on power and subordination.

> *"We've actually shared everything 50:50 since kindergarten. We also split the parental leave, but of course based on our needs* (...) *more with mum at the beginning* (...) *and then he was with me for the last six months. And she pumped* (...) *Then there was a handover, so to speak. And then from the age of 14 months, he went to nursery and from that moment on we had a 50:50 split. That means he spends two fixed days with one parent and the other three days of the week alternate, but always combined so that he is in one place for five days in a row and two days in the other. We share everything – housework, shopping, cooking. It's pretty much 50:50."*
>
> (27 ES, male, 36)

This passage is interesting in several respects because it describes the ideal of an egalitarian division of labour in a context that subverts traditional heteronormative family models. The father, who lives in a same-sex partnership, organises childcare in a co-parenting arrangement with the child's mother and emphasises a consistent 50:50 division of labour, both in everyday care work (household chores, shopping, cooking) and in childcare.

The needs-oriented organisation of the first phase of life is noteworthy: the mother took on the majority of childcare in the first few months, with the father taking over later, with a clearly structured handover phase. This practice points to a conscious combination of child-centred care and equal distribution between partners. It shows that egalitarian arrangements do not necessarily have to be organised as rigid symmetries but can vary in phases – a principle that Joan Tronto (1993, 2013) describes as responsive care.

What is structurally interesting here is that the arrangement is not based on the classic couple constellation, but on an extended family model based on clear agreements and organisational predictability. This also makes the case an example of what Goldberg and Allen (2020) have described for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex & Allies (LGBTQIA+) parents – the conscious negotiation of care arrangements outside heteronormative role prescriptions.

At the same time, it is clear that this model is based on certain resources: good education, flexible working conditions and a high level of communication between the co-parents. These factors act as structural enablers – without them, such a consistent implementation of a 50:50 division would probably be difficult to achieve.

Overall, this constellation points both to the potential of alternative family models for achieving gender equality in care work and to the continuing importance of structural resources that secure such models. The interviews clearly show that this form of egalitarian care work is often based on structural prerequisites such as flexible working time models and stable employment situations. The men are mostly well educated and work in professions that allow for flexible working models. Economic security plays a major role, as men in precarious employment or with traditional income models (e.g. sole breadwinner model) often have fewer opportunities to reduce their working hours.

Biographical socialisation also plays a role: men* who have already experienced alternatives to traditional masculinity practices in their parents' home (e.g. a retired father who was at home, as in the case outlined above) or who consciously distance themselves from traditional gender norms are more open to equal care arrangements. Awareness of equality and gender justice is correspondingly strong in this group. Fathers in particular described care work as identity-forming and emphasised the emotional dimension of fatherhood.

> *"And my psychotherapist once said to me, in the early years with my son, you're actually mum and dad at the same time* (...) *And I have to say, I kind of liked that. Not breastfeeding, of course* (...) *Maybe I developed a quiet envy. But still, in all other respects."*
>
> (27 ES, male, 36)

This group of men* shows a deep commitment to care work and sees it not only as a necessary duty, but as an enriching part of their lives.

### *"Helping masculinities": supportive but not equally responsible roles*

A second type of men* take on care work selectively but are not considered primarily responsible for it. Helping masculinities are best illustrated in this exemplary quote:

> *"Yes. My husband is currently on parental leave. For two months* (...) *I've actually been doing most of the housework myself. But my husband does help me. Cooking and laundry. And* (...) *everything I ask him to do. Actually."*
>
> (42 OP, female, 26)

Men* temporarily relieve their partners but continue to delegate responsibility and planning to them – a phenomenon that has become established as "mental load asymmetry" (Daminger 2019). Their understanding of roles remains ambivalent: although participation does take place, it is mostly in the form of "help" rather than coordinated, shared responsibility, and it has to be demanded:

> *So it's a bit different now than it was when the children were little. In fact, we've slipped into such traditional roles, such a traditional division of roles, since the children came along* (...) *although in terms of housework, we've always divided it up between us. But I would say, says my husband, that's more because I insisted on it. He probably wouldn't have done it on his own initiative* (...) *It's always been like that, depending on who has more to do at the moment. Depending on who's there and who has the capacity, someone just does something. Yes."*
>
> *(01 ES, female, 41)*

The case study illustrates how, in couples with a traditional division of labour – in this case, he works full-time and she is on maternity leave – a form of "helping masculinity" has established itself, in which men* do take on some care and household work, but do not act as the primary caregivers. The interviewee describes that a more equal division of household tasks only came about at her express insistence and not on her partner's own initiative. This clearly shifts the responsibility for organising, coordinating and initiating the division of labour to her, while he

remains in a complementary, non-equally responsible role. This constellation is characteristic of the *mental* load asymmetry described in research.

At the same time, it becomes clear that the division of labour in this couple is not based on a structured, jointly shared logic of responsibility, but is rather situational and capacity-oriented ("*whoever has more to do at the moment just does it*"). This flexible but unstructured form of task distribution can provide short-term relief, but in the long term it contributes to the stabilisation of traditional patterns of responsibility, as the overall organisation of everyday life remains tied to the female partner. The interviewee's reference to "sliding into" a traditional division of roles after the birth of the children points to a broader, empirically well-documented trend (cf. Grunow et al. 2012), according to which egalitarian couples often revert to gender-typical divisions of labour when starting a family.

The ambivalence of this constellation lies in the fact that although equality is rhetorically recognised and practised in part, its realisation depends on individual negotiation and the assertiveness of women*. Male participation appears as a form of support – and not as a matter of course in the assumption of equal responsibility. In this logic, care work continues to be framed as primarily a female domain, which reproduces existing asymmetries of power and responsibility.

### *"Podium masculinity": symbolic equality amid structural persistence*

A third pattern emerges in narratives of men* who temporarily take on care tasks – for example, through a "daddy month" or by taking parental leave – and symbolically valorise this experience as a contribution to the creation of equitable conditions, while traditional divisions of labour remain in place in the long term.[16] This form of participation creates a narrative of equality without structural change, which can be seen as strategic equality. These symbolic actions mark a discursive opening, but not a sustainable redistribution. They function as performative gestures that suggest equality while real power and work relationships remain unchanged. The economic structure – such as the classic breadwinner model – is not questioned here but legitimised in the mode of individual decision-making.

An example: Before the birth of their children, the interviewee (53 ES, male, 45 years old) worked full-time, as did his partner, both in healthcare professions. When they started a family, the division of labour shifted: while the interviewee took two months of parental leave for the first child and then another six months, according to his own statements, his female partner remained in the primary care role for most of the first few years. For the second child, his parental leave was reduced to four months, supplemented by a period of part-time parental leave, during which he mainly took care of the children and their leisure activities. Certain household and care tasks were clearly divided: shopping, transporting the children and organising holidays were more his responsibility, while laundry was almost exclusively his partner's responsibility, and she also took care of the day-to-day organisation and household routines. External help (domestic help for ironing) was purchased, which eased the daily burden but did not fundamentally redistribute it.

[16] This refers to actions that explicitly aim to promote equality but do not sufficiently take into account existing structural power relations and inequalities in everyday life.

The interview contains several passages that clearly illustrate typical elements of "podium masculinity": time-limited participation in care work that is marked as exceptional and discursively framed as a contribution to greater equality, without any permanent change in the fundamental division of labour. For example, the interviewee describes his early parental leave with his first child as a remarkable commitment: "*... the father takes parental leave with an eight-week-old baby. I think we managed it quite well.*" He also emphasises his subsequent parental leave of six months for his son and four months for his daughter. At the same time, responsibility for the ongoing organisation of childcare and housekeeping remains largely with his partner, as is clear from his wording: "*Well, I'd say what's left is shopping and cooking.* (...) *My wife mainly does the laundry* (...) *I'd say cooking is split about 70:30" (53 ES, male, 45).* This practice corresponds to the pattern of strategic equality: selective tasks are discursively upgraded and presented as egalitarian participation but primarily serve as a symbolic demonstration of modernity and commitment. Structural conditions – such as the slightly asymmetrical income (60:40), the woman*'s primary responsibility for certain areas of care and the traditional attribution of his role as the "driving force" behind leisure activities – are not fundamentally questioned. The example thus shows how "podium masculinities" performatively suggest equality without bringing about a sustainable redistribution of responsibility and power within the family.

### *Hybrid models and situational negotiations*

Between clearly defined types of division of labour, the interviews increasingly reveal hybrid models in which men* take on substantial responsibility for care work depending on their stage of life, employment context or family situation. These arrangements are often the result of long-term negotiation processes but are also flexible enough to adapt to changing requirements. Particularly among couples with a high level of formal education and a reflective understanding of roles, there is a clear willingness to jointly reorganise family work arrangements and thus question traditional patterns of responsibility.

One example of this is described by an interviewee who consciously reduced her working hours with her partner and divided the childcare days equally between them: "*We both reduced our hours to 20 and divided the days exactly between us – that worked well for us and for the child*" *(54 OP, female, 33).* The agreement represents a model in which time resources are structured according to jointly defined needs rather than gender-typical norms.

Another couple divides tasks according to individual preferences, time availability and skills. The female partner describes:

> "*Because my boyfriend really likes to cook and eat. He works as a teacher, so he comes home at 12:00,* (...) *which means that I don't help with any of the cooking, shopping or general kitchen cleaning; that's all his domain and he does everything.* (...) *But otherwise I do the housework, which means cleaning. We actually do the laundry together, depending on who has time.* (...) *Everyone does the area they are better at, where they have more time, where they feel more like doing it.*"
>
> *(19 JS, female, 31)*

Such models show that the division of labour between partners does not necessarily have to be strictly symmetrical, but can be based on a recognised principle of equality, in which responsibilities are distributed consciously and transparently. However, they require a high level of willingness to cooperate, the possibility of reducing working hours and a clear departure from normative models of male-centred employment. In practice, they demonstrate that existing gender logics can be transformed both actively and pragmatically.

The decisive difference between the hybrid model described above and the concept of *caring masculinities* lies both in the motivation and scope of the change and in the relationship to structural conditions. While *caring masculinities* (Elliot 2016; Scambor et al. 2014) are based on a fundamental normative shift – caring, empathy and relationship orientation are understood as central and enduring elements of male identity and are thus anchored beyond hegemonic models of autonomy, competitiveness and the role of breadwinner – hybrid models are often pragmatic, situationally adapted negotiations in everyday family life.

In the interview-based examples, partnership arrangements arise from a combination of individual preferences, time resources and biographical opportunity structures. Nevertheless, they often remain within existing gender norms and are not necessarily linked to a fundamental questioning of traditional images of masculinity. Structurally, these models face much greater challenges: work cultures, income disparities and inadequate institutional frameworks (e.g. for reduced working hours or shared parental leave) continue to favour full-time employment for men. Achieving a partnership-based division of labour therefore requires a high degree of individual willingness to negotiate, organisation and mutual commitment.

While *caring masculinities* aim in the long term to normalise male care orientation and change social structures, the hybrid models described here are more dependent on specific stages of life and are therefore potentially more fragile. They demonstrate that gender arrangements can indeed be actively and creatively transformed, but at the same time they illustrate how much additional effort is needed to achieve genuine partnership in the care sector in a structurally unequal environment.

## Conclusion: Gender relations in care work as a site of reproduction and change

The evaluation of the interview data makes it clear that care work is a central crystallisation point for gender orders – a place where social inequalities not only become visible, but are reproduced, justified or questioned on a daily basis. Both in retrospect on the family of origin and in the narratives about the current life situation, a profound gendering of care work becomes apparent. This cannot be attributed solely to individual attitudes, but results from the interplay of cultural patterns of interpretation, habitual dispositions and structural conditions.

At the same time, the interviews show that gender relations in care work are not necessarily rigid. Rather, biographical transitions, partnership negotiations and generational constellations open up spaces for reflection and change. Working women* in particular are increasingly demanding fairer distribution and using periods of care work as a starting point for development and education processes.

The role of men* in care work is neither marginal nor clear-cut. The interviews reveal a spectrum of positions ranging from reproductive support roles to reflexive, egalitarian care practices. It

becomes clear that care work is a central field of negotiation for masculinity – a place where normative expectations, subjective orientations and structural conditions collide. The empirical distinctions point to the need to understand masculinities in their plurality and situational dynamics – as an expression of a complex interrelationship between individual agency and social structural embedding.

Care work is thus neither mere reproduction nor mere transformation, but a conflictual space of action and interpretation in which gender becomes effective as a social structure – but can also be experienced as changeable. The empirical findings point to the need to understand care work as a socio-politically relevant field that goes beyond family micro-practices and touches on fundamental questions of social justice, recognition and participation.

### 3.3.2 Gainful employment and financial resources

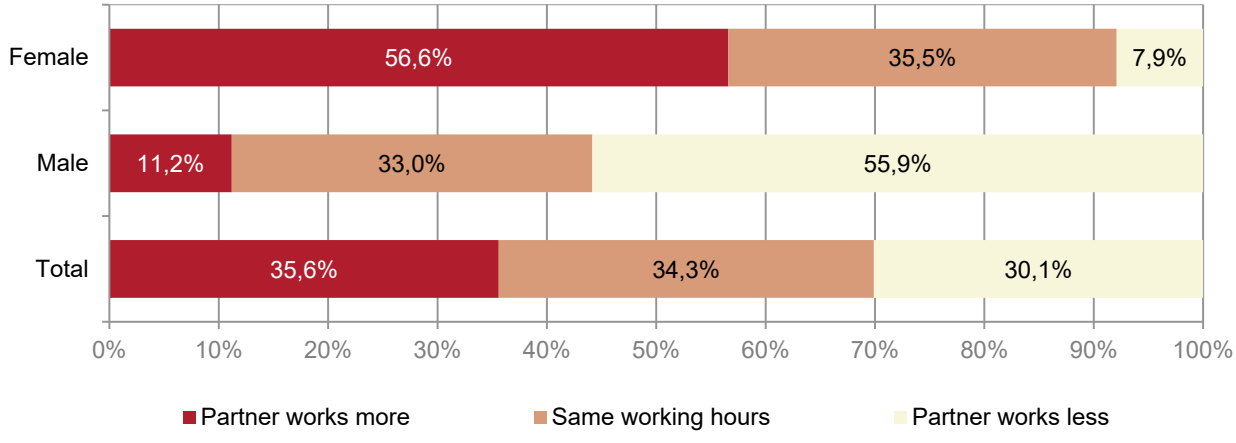
The following section takes a closer look at gender-specific differences in paid work and income. It draws primarily on the results of the quantitative survey, which are then compared with existing labour market data.

#### Quantitative findings on the distribution of gainful employment

As already mentioned, despite high levels of agreement on questions relating to gender equality and the rejection of stereotypical gender roles (see Section 3.1), a "traditional" division of paid and unpaid work within partnerships can be observed.

The quantitative survey does not reveal any significant gender differences in terms of active employment, but there are differences in terms of the amount of work done. More than half of the male respondents say they work more than their partners. A similarly high proportion of women* surveyed say that their partner works more than they do. Approximately one third of respondents – slightly more among women*, at around 36% – state that there is a balanced amount of work within their partnership. In contrast, only around 8% of female respondents state that they work more. Among men*, 11% state that they work less (see Figure 12).

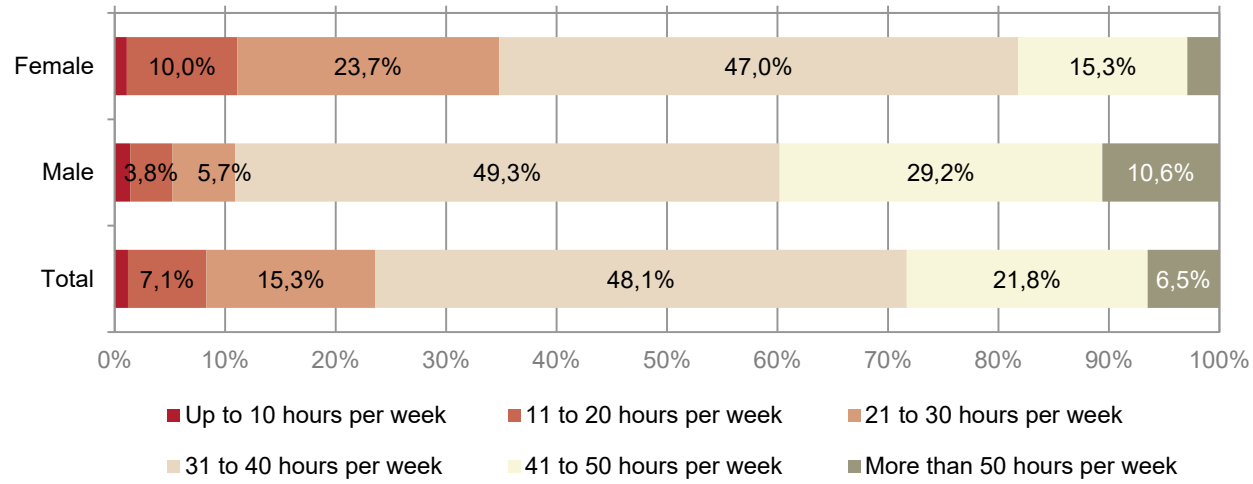
**Figure 12 : Workload in relation to current partner, by gender**



Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,891, n miss=312, weighted sample

This picture is illustrated by the number of hours spent on paid work per week: women* are more likely than men* to work between 21 and 30 hours, while men* are significantly more likely to work 40 hours or more (see Figure 13).

**Figure13: Working hours, by gender**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,875, n miss=366, weighted sample; values below 3% not shown for clarity.

These findings are consistent with existing labour market data. For example, there are slight differences in employment rates between men* and women* in the Austrian population, but the part-time employment rate is significantly higher among women than among men*. In 2023, around 31% of people in Austria will be employed part-time, rising to 32% of the workforce by 2024, with just over half of all women* (51%) and just under 14% of men* working part-time (cf. Statistics Austria 2025, p. 22). In terms of actual hours, the weekly working time in 2022 will be 26 hours for women* and 33.4 hours for men* (cf. Statistics Austria 2023a, p. 27) . According to the time use study by Statistics Austria (cf. Statistics Austria 2023b, p. 59) , women* between the ages of 20 and 39 spend 07:43 per day on gainful employment, while men* spend just over nine hours[17] .

### Income relations in partnerships

Gender-specific income disparities remain prevalent in Austria[18] . Across all sectors, women's hourly earnings are 19% lower than those of men. The gender pay gap in Austria is thus significantly higher than the EU average of around 13% (cf. Mayrhuber et al. 2024, p. 122).

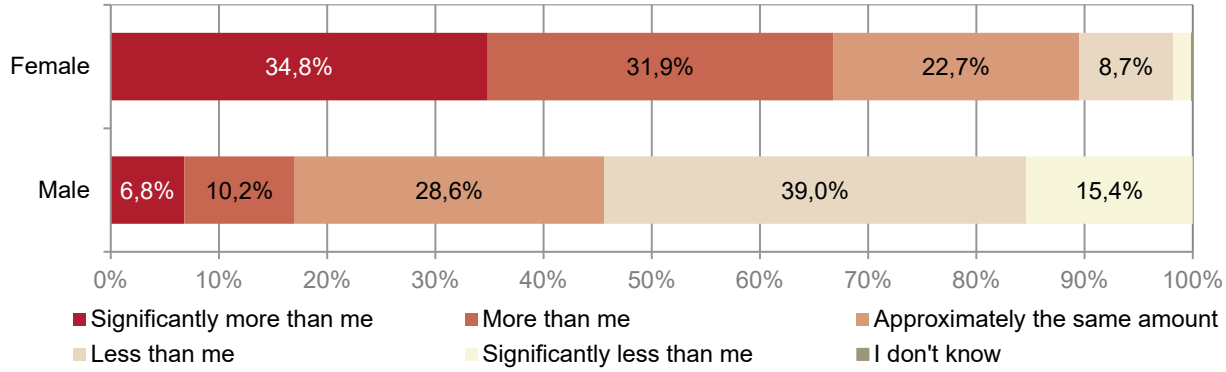
[17] If the activity is carried out on the day in question.

[18] There are different ways of calculating gender pay gaps; due to the varying lengths of working hours (because of high part-time rates among women), hourly wages are particularly suitable; however, this does not allow conclusions to be drawn about the financial situation in general (Mayrhuber et al. 2024, p. 122).

This existing imbalance is also evident in the quantitative survey conducted as part of the study: more than a third of female respondents say that their partner has significantly more money at their disposal than they do, and in a further third, the partner has more money than the respondent. Among male respondents, this applies to around 7% and 10% respectively.

Conversely, slightly less than a third of women* state that they have more or significantly more money than their partner – among male respondents, only 17% say that their partner has more or significantly more money than them. Less than a quarter of the women* surveyed have a comparable level of economic resources. Among men*, this applies to around 29% (see Figure 14).

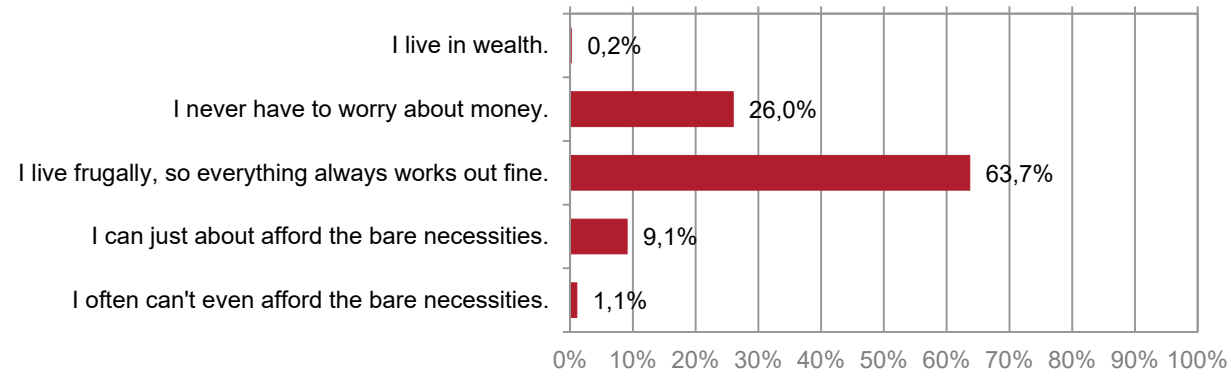
**Figure14 : Economic relationship in partnerships, by gender**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,891, n miss=366, weighted sample; values below 3% not shown for better clarity.

Despite the clear differences in income, the general economic situation is assessed independently of the gender of the respondents. Around a quarter of respondents say they do not have to worry about money, while two-thirds believe that they live frugally and are therefore financially secure. In contrast, just under 10% of respondents say they can only afford the bare necessities or often not even that (see Figure 15).

**Figure15: Economic situation (if currently in a relationship)**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023; n=1,891, n miss=38, weighted sample.

### 3.3.3 Decision-making patterns in families and partnerships

Decision-making processes within families and partnerships are key indicators of internal power relations, role perceptions and gender-specific positioning. They help determine whether family members perceive themselves as self-effective, whether responsibility is shared or organised hierarchically, and how differences are dealt with.

By asking who has or had the final say in the partnership or family of origin, quantitative statements can be made about decision-making relationships. Qualitative analyses also revealed how decision-making processes are negotiated and legitimised in families. This shows that decision-making patterns are not only an expression of family dynamics, but also products of social structural conditions and gender order.

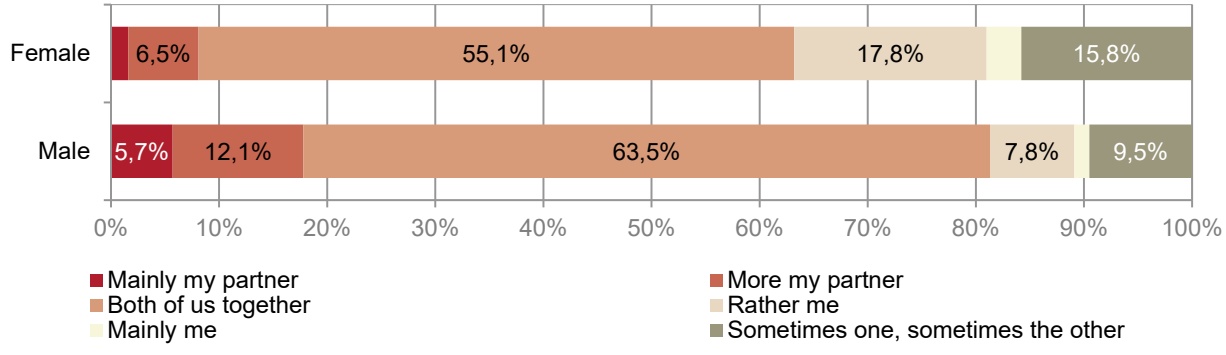
#### Quantitative classification of decision-making relationships

Two key findings can be derived from the quantitative findings. It appears that the majority of respondents – specifically 59% – make joint decisions. An additional 13% state that they make decisions "sometimes one way, sometimes the other", which, even if not jointly, still indicates a certain balance in decision-making processes. In contrast, an imbalance in decision-making behaviour can be observed in 28% of respondents.

The second key finding is the existing gender-specific differences. There is an imbalance in joint decision-making: women* are less likely than men* to have the "final say" in partnerships. However, women* are more likely to believe that decisions are made "sometimes one way, sometimes the other".

More significant differences can be observed with regard to imbalance in decision-making: female respondents are more likely to say that they tend to or mainly have the final say – together slightly less than a quarter. This is confirmed by the assessment of men: a comparable number say that their partner has the final say and not themselves. Conversely, just under 10% of male respondents or the partners of female respondents more often have the final say (see Fig. 16 ). There are no differences according to the educational level of the respondents (see table appendix).

**Figure16 : If in a relationship: Last say in the relationship, by gender**

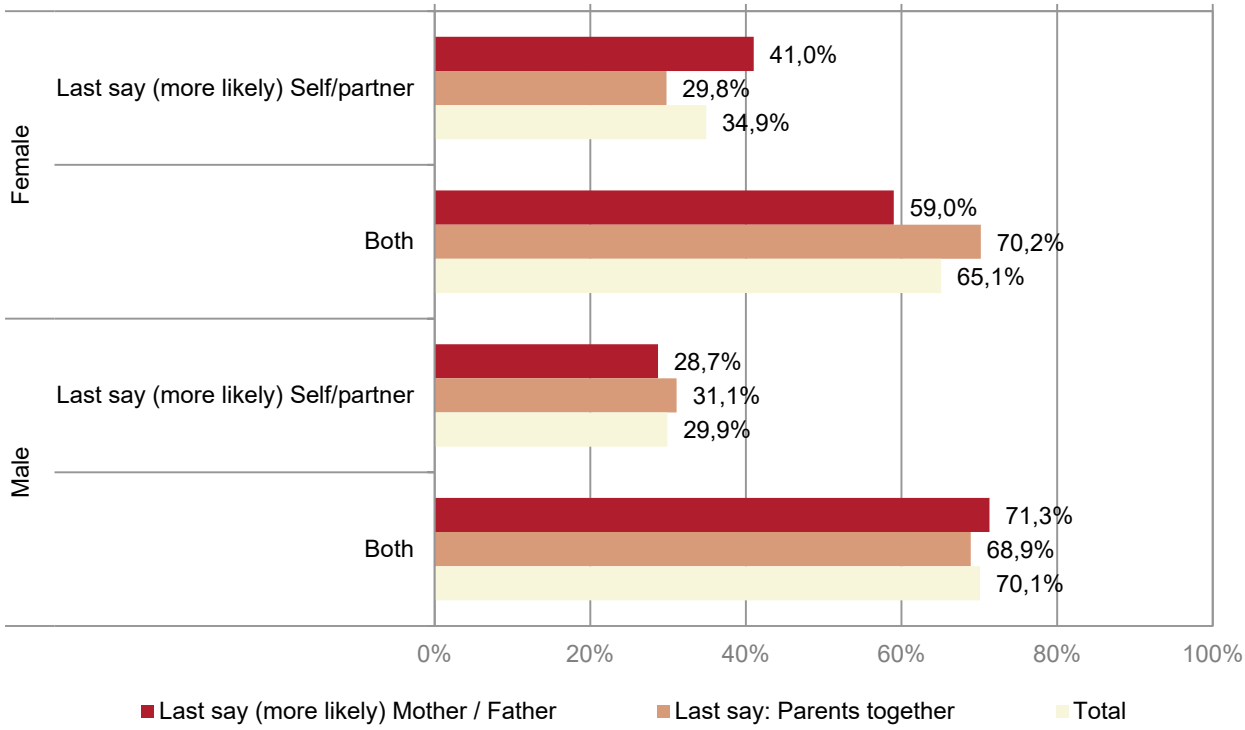



Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,891, n miss=34, weighted sample; values below 3% not shown for better clarity.

A similar picture emerges with regard to the family of origin. Approximately half of those surveyed stated that their father and mother made decisions together, slightly more than a quarter stated that the final say (tended to) lie with their father, and just under a quarter (tended to) with their mother. There are slight differences according to gender: men* tend to think that the father had the final say slightly more often, while women* tend to think that the mother had the final say (see table appendix).

The extent to which there is a connection between parents' decision-making behaviour and that in their own partnership is not clear. Among male respondents, no correlation was found between current decision-making behaviour in their partnership and that in their family of origin. Among female respondents, however, it was found that joint decision-making in the partnership was more common if this was also the case in the family of origin (see Figure 17).

**Figure17: "Last say": comparison between family of origin and current partnership**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,891, n miss=93, weighted sample.

## Qualitative classification of decision-making behaviour

### Olson model: cohesion, flexibility, communication

David H. Olson's structural model (2000) provides a differentiated theoretical framework for the analytical recording and interpretation of decision-making behaviour. It is based on three central dimensions:

- Cohesion: the extent of emotional attachment between family members (from disengagement to entanglement)

- Flexibility: the ability of the family system to adapt to new demands (from rigid to chaotic)
- Communication: a mediating meta-dimension that influences both cohesion and flexibility.

Olson postulates that families with moderate cohesion and flexibility ("balanced systems") have the greatest adaptability and potential for development, while extreme forms (rigid or chaotic systems) are often dysfunctional. In the following, the decision-making patterns reconstructed from the interview material in the respondents' families of origin are typified and analysed along this model, with a particular focus on the gender-related legitimation of decision-making power. The Olson model proved to be a useful theoretical lens in the analyses of our qualitative data.

### Hierarchies, symbolic power and democratic structures

The qualitative analysis allows the findings of the survey to be classified into general power structures and family decision-making patterns, and deeper insights to be gained from decision-making processes.

With regard to the current partnerships, complex dynamics can be observed in the interviews, which are elaborated in chapter 3.3.5 in the matched pair case analyses and in chapter 3.4. The decision-making processes in the families of origin are presented separately below.

*Unbalanced decision-making patterns: hierarchy, authority and symbolic power*

Although the quantitative data indicate a certain balance in the decision-making behaviour of the majority of respondents, the interviews reveal deeper power structures. Numerous interview statements point to strongly hierarchical decision-making structures in the families of origin, which are typical of Olson's "rigid systems". In these cases, decision-making power is clearly assigned (mostly to male family members) without these positions of power within the family being questioned or explicitly justified.

In one case, for example, the father figure is described as the undisputed authority: "*Dad had the final say. Plain and simple. If he said it, that's how it was*" *(57 OP, female, 57).* The matter-of-factness with which male decision-making power is exercised and accepted points to a culturally entrenched patriarchal norm, as described by Illouz (2023): Authority does not appear here as something that needs to be justified, but as a "natural" order.

Another example: "*My grandfather and my dad had the decision-making power* (...) *My grandfather was* (...) *more of a stubborn type* (...) *Only the way he does it is right*" *(18 JS, female, 31 years old).* Here, too, male power of definition remains unquestioned and is stabilised by intergenerational transmission.

*Female decision-making power as subject to legitimation*

In contrast, the interviews show that when women* have decision-making power, it is linked to narratives of justification and pressures to legitimise their decisions. Female dominance in the decision-making process is seen as a deviation and must be legitimised or explained accordingly – whether through special skills, external constraints or the absence of a male counterpart. For example, one interviewee says about his mother:

> "*My mother placed a lot of importance on getting out of (city name). She then more or less made the decisions and has control over the money that my father actually earned. And I think that somehow hurt his ego.*"
>
> (53 ES, male, 45)

The mother's decision-making power appears here as a deviation from the male-coded norm, creating tensions that require explanation – a classic example of symbolic violence in Bourdieu's sense (1997), which is particularly evident in the need to legitimise female autonomy.

In other cases, too, female decision-making power is linked to special contextual conditions – such as language skills: "*My mother was* (...) *in a position of power because of her language skills*" *(05 VS, female, 33)* or functional role shifts: "*My mother had the final say – because my father didn't have a driving licence*" *(05 VS, female, 33)*. Structural access to decision-making power thus often remains tied to functional or biographical necessities and not to a fundamental equality in the family's decision-making sphere.

*Democratic and flexible decision-making patterns: participation according to involvement*

Contrary to the hierarchical and legitimation-based constellations in the material, balanced decision-making patterns, as described by Olson as "structured, flexible systems", are also evident in the family of origin. Here, decisions are made participatively, with decision-making power based on the respective level of involvement.

An example: "*My brother and I have always been the relevant people who were ultimately allowed or* required *to make the decisions*" *(06 ES, male, 43). Decision-making* is understood here as a process-oriented and context-dependent activity – not as an expression of permanent positions, but as a situational division of responsibility.

The so-called "family council" (with all family members) is also mentioned several times, for example in relation to a medical-ethical decision: "*That was a decision we made in the family council*" *(01 ES, female, 41)*. This form of joint negotiation points to a democratic culture of communication in which all participants are recognised as capable of acting.

A particularly thoughtful approach to decision-making responsibility is evident in the following quote: "*Those who are most affected by the consequences of decisions have the greatest weight in the decision-making process*" *(Decision-making patterns in families, 2024)*. This logic corresponds to Olson's ideal of a highly functional family system with strong empathic communication and situational adaptability.

### Conclusion: Decision-making power as a reflection of social order

The analysis makes it clear that decision-making processes in families are both an expression and a mechanism for reproducing social inequalities. While male decision-making power often seems self-evident and legitimate, female authority in the family context usually requires additional justification . This asymmetry points to deeply rooted models that remain effective despite functional changes.

Olson's structural model allows these dynamics to be systematically captured. Families with rigid or chaotic decision-making structures show little adaptability, while balanced, participatory patterns promote resilience and self-efficacy. Particularly striking is the interaction between the quality of communication and the gender-specific distribution of definitional power: where communication is open and reflective, traditional power patterns are more likely to be broken down.

The empirical findings thus underscore the importance of structural and symbolic frameworks for decision-making power – and invite us to understand family negotiation processes not only as private dynamics, but as socially framed practices.

## 3.3.4 Connection: Division of labour – decisions – resources

A central concern of the study is to illustrate the complex interrelationships between the division of paid and unpaid work, resources and decision-making processes. Statistical correlations and corresponding differences can be derived from the quantitative survey, the qualitative interviews help shed light on influencing factors. The following section presents the findings from the quantitative survey, and we lay out qualitative analyses in chapter 3.4.

### Correlations and structural differences: paid work, unpaid work and economic resources

The mutual influence of gender-based inequalities in paid and unpaid work and the associated economic inequalities can be illustrated by a variety of data and analyses. For example, there are differences in employment rates depending on care responsibilities: Among women* with at least one child under the age of six, 74% are employed, compared to 94% of men*. This difference changes only slightly for children under the age of 15 (79% vs. 94%). In contrast, the employment rate for people without children is relatively balanced (cf. Mayrhuber et al. 2024).

This is also evident in the reasons given for working part-time: According to the microcensus labour force survey (cf. Statistics Austria 2023a), around 40% of women* are not in full-time employment due to care responsibilities. Only around 7% of men* state that they work part-time due to these responsibilities. A lower number of working hours is more common due to education or further training.

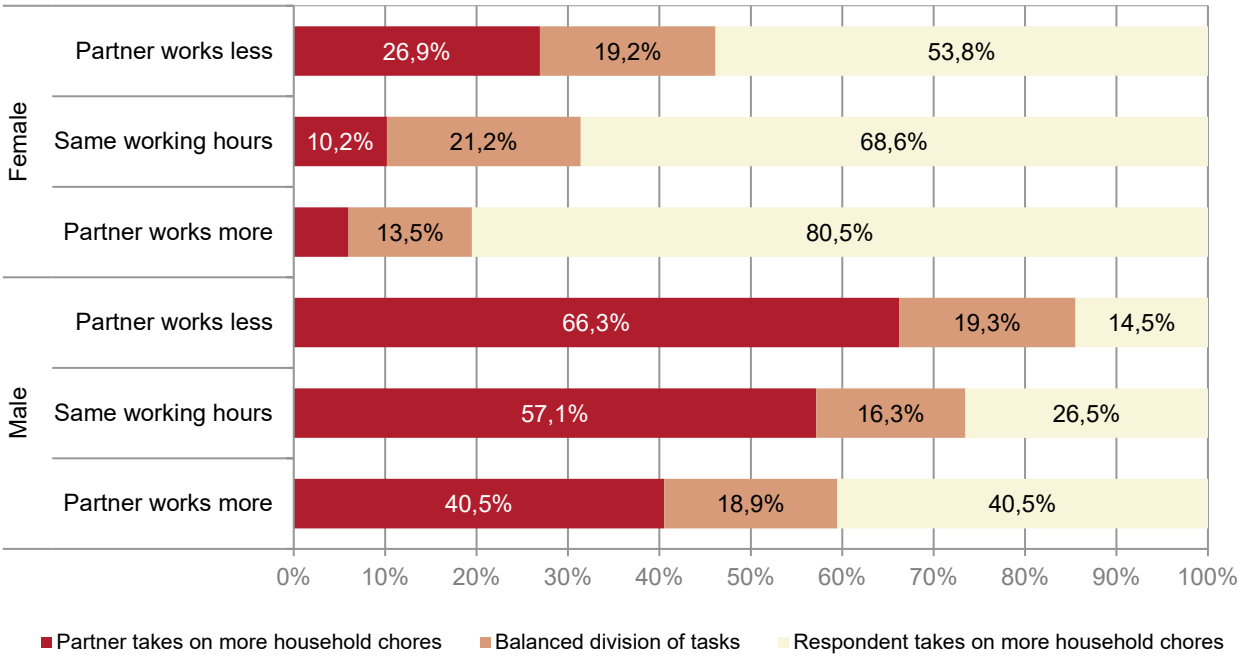
In addition, gender-related differences in career breaks due to care responsibilities and the associated imbalance in the distribution of unpaid work have a negative impact on the economic situation of women. Career breaks due to care work in particular are referred to as the

"motherhood penalty" or "fatherhood bonus": Men benefit – including financially – from fatherhood if they do not take on care responsibilities, whereas women risk losing their position and/or suffering a loss of income if they wish to reduce their working hours due to parenthood (cf. Bergmann et al. 2012). Calculations from the *Return to Work Monitoring* show that women* in the 2008 cohort have a similarly high salary by the time their child reaches the age of 14 as they did before taking parental leave, while men* have a higher salary than before (cf. Riesenfelder & Danzer 2024).

The survey we conducted also clearly shows the links between paid and unpaid work and the gender-specific inequalities in this area. There are clear differences in the balance of unpaid housework depending on the working time ratio – i.e. whether the partners work the same amount or not. Among female respondents, the proportion of those who have a balanced division of tasks is highest (21%) when they have the same working hours as their partners. The figure is almost as high (19%) when the partners work more. In this case, more than a quarter of the women* surveyed say that their partner does more housework. However, in line with existing studies (see Statistics Austria 2023b), even when women work more than their partners, they still do the majority of unpaid housework.

A similar trend can be observed among male respondents. Here, 41% of respondents say they take on more housework when their partner works more – but just as many say that, when there is a corresponding imbalance in working hours, their partner tends to take care of the housework. Furthermore, it is striking that among male respondents, the proportion of those who experience a balanced division of tasks in their partnership is lowest among those with equal working hours. However, the differences here are very small (see Figure 18).

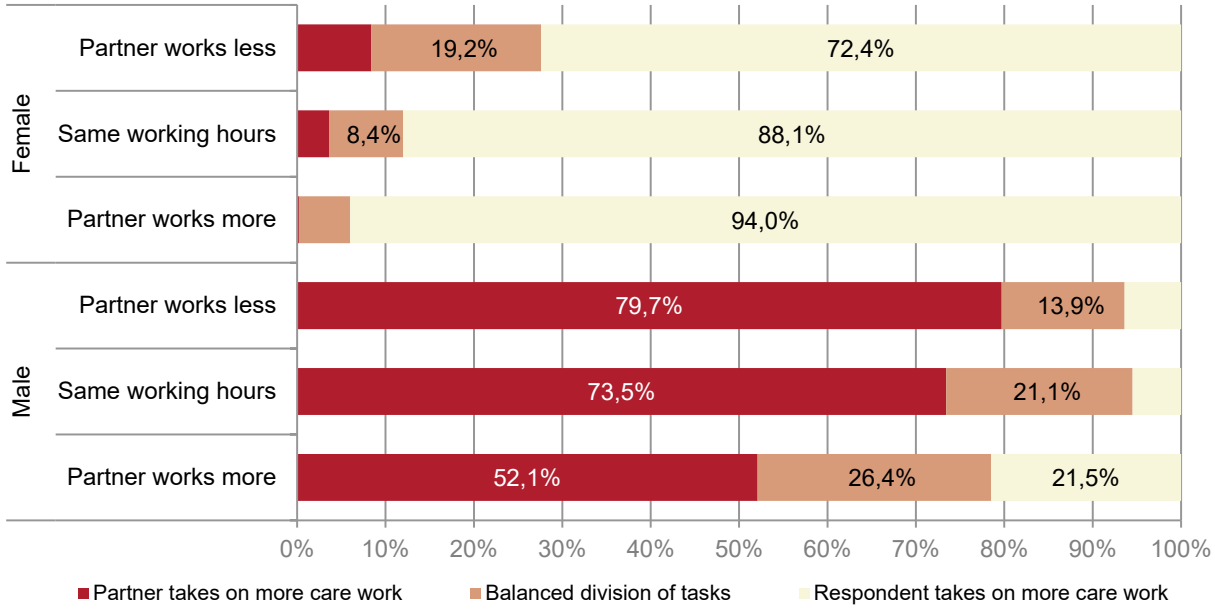
**Figure 18 : In partnerships and shared households: comparison of paid and unpaid work, by gender**



Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,597, n miss=315, weighted sample.

An even greater imbalance is evident in the division of care work. Around 17% of male respondents and only 7% of female respondents say that they have an equal division of care work in their partnership (see section 3.3.1). Among male respondents, the highest proportion of balanced care work is found when their partners work more hours in paid employment than they do themselves. This applies to around a quarter of respondents. If, on the other hand, the partner works less, a balanced distribution is only observed in around 14% of cases. Similar effects can be seen among female respondents: if the partner works less than the respondents themselves, 19% report a balanced distribution of care work in their partnership, compared to 8% when both partners work the same number of hours and 6% when the partner works more (see Figure 19 ).

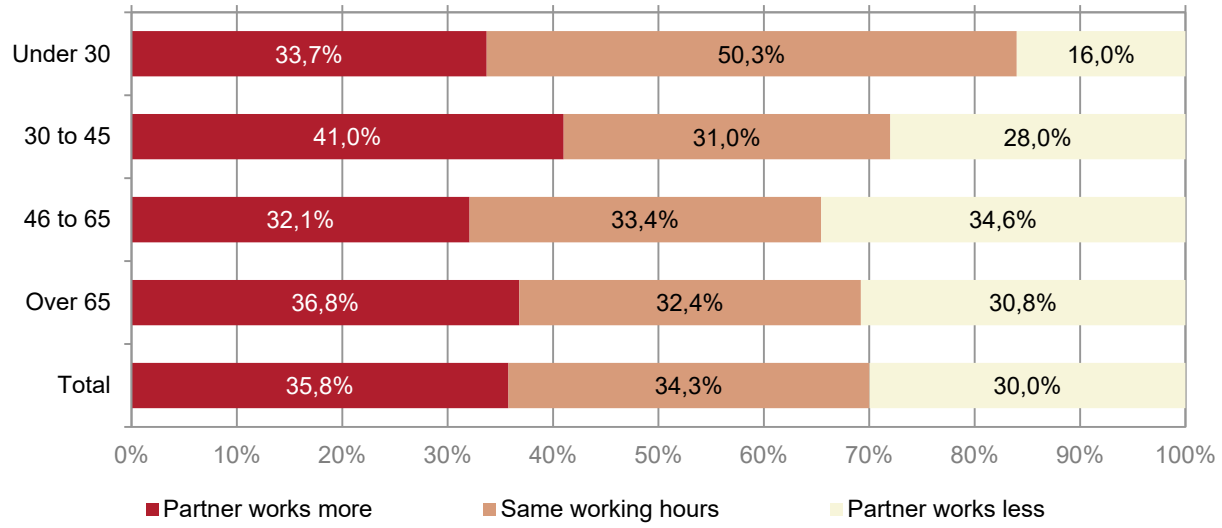
**Figure 19 : When partnership and children: Comparison of paid and unpaid care work, by gender**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,429, n miss=394, weighted sample; values below 3% not shown for better clarity.

Differences in age also indicate that inequalities in the extent of employment are linked to care responsibilities. Half of those surveyed under the age of 30 say they have a balanced amount of working hours within their partnership, but this proportion declines from the age of 30 onwards (see Figure 20).

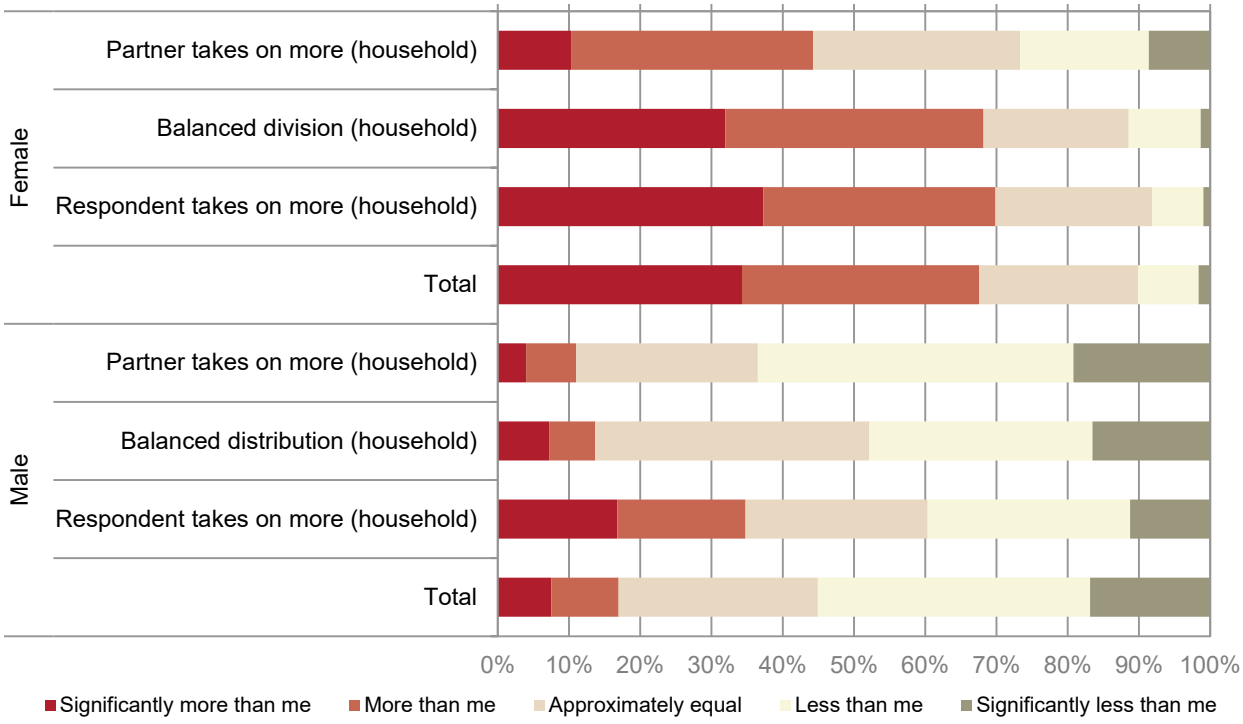
**Figure20: Working hours in relation to partner, by age**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,875, n miss=366, weighted sample

The economic situation (or, more specifically, the relationship within the partnership) is also linked to a balanced distribution of unpaid work. There are clear differences in this regard, particularly among male respondents: 39% say they have both a balanced economic situation and a balanced division of household tasks within their partnership. In contrast, when there is an imbalance in unpaid housework, a quarter of male respondents state that they earn approximately the same amount of money (see Figure 21).

**Figure21: Comparison: Housework and economic relationship in partnerships, by gender**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,600, n miss=376, weighted sample; values below 3% not shown for clarity.

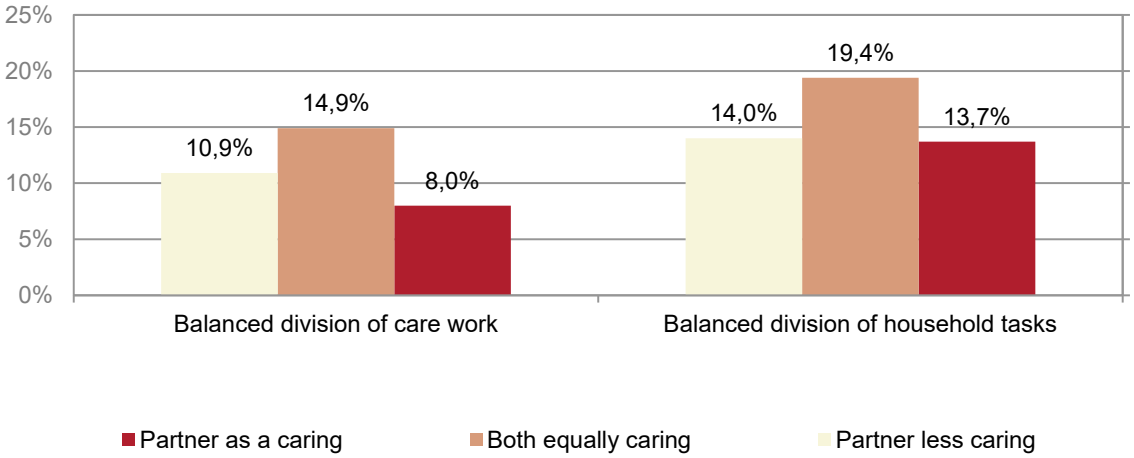
## Balanced unpaid work in connection with caregiving, decision-making processes and attitudes towards "traditional" gender roles

Although there is clearly a mutual influence between paid and unpaid work, the existing inequality in the division of domestic and care work cannot be explained by this relationship alone. As both the quantitative survey and the interviews show in a very differentiated way (see sections 3.2.5 and 3.4), attitudes towards gender roles, the assessment of one's own caring behaviour and the individual evaluation of care play an important role. Concepts such as "caring masculinities" show that caring, as part of male role and identity construction, has a positive influence on gender equality (cf. Scambor & Holtermann 2023; Gärtner & Scambor 2020; Elliott 2016; Scambor et al. 2014).

The surveys and analyses showed that these relationships and influences are extremely complex and multifaceted in couple relationships and families: what promotes greater equality in one couple may have little or no effect in another (see sections 3.2.5 and 3.4). Despite this, statistical correlations that have been identified (coupled with qualitatively identified conditions) can provide potential approaches that may promote equality in couple relationships (albeit not along causal lines). In the survey, self-assessments and external assessments were used to determine the extent to which respondents and their partners care for others, and a relational variable was calculated based on this – i.e. the extent to which self-assessments and external assessments diverge. The results show that those who report a balance in unpaid housework and care work in their partnership are particularly likely to rate themselves and their

partner as equally caring. Around 15% of respondents reported this in relation to care work. In comparison, around 11% reported a balanced distribution when their partner was rated as more caring than themselves, and only 8% when they rated themselves as more caring. When it comes to housework, around 19% report a balanced division when comparable levels of care are indicated. If the external and self-assessments differ, this applies to only around 14% (see Figure 22 ).

**Figure 22 : Care for others and balanced housework and care work**

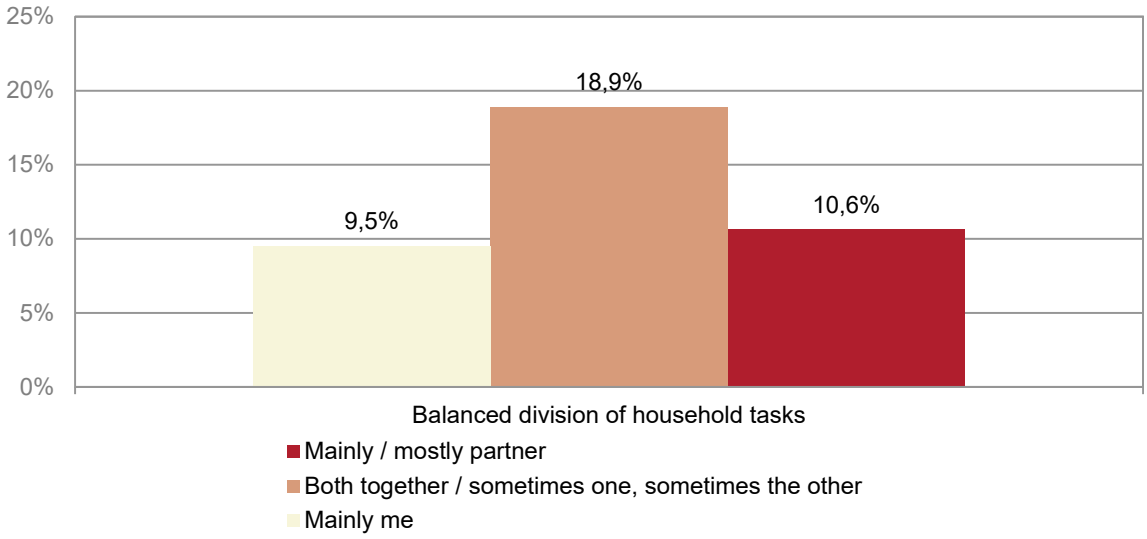



Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,597; n miss=330, or n=1,429; n miss = 325 weighted sample.

Analyses differentiated by gender suggest that a balanced assessment of care has a different effect on women* and men*: among female respondents, those who perceive their partners as more caring than themselves are more likely to experience a balanced division of care work. However, due to the small number of cases, no reliable conclusions can be drawn from this.

The decision-making dynamics within partnerships also paint a similar picture to that seen in caregiving. When people say that they make the "final decision" together or decide "sometimes one way, sometimes the other," unpaid housework is most often divided equally. In cases where there is an imbalance in decision-making power, however, this applies to approximately 10% (see Figure 23 ). A comparison between the sexes – which, however, is only of limited significance here due to the small number of cases – also shows that among male respondents, the proportion of those who experience a balanced division of housework is considerably lower when they themselves have the final say.

**Figure 23 : When partners live together and share a household: the last word and balance in housework**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,597; n miss=340, weighted sample.

Intergenerational effects are less clear to interpret. With regard to the division of unpaid housework in relation to decision-making processes in the family of origin, it appears that, regardless of gender, those respondents who reported the most balanced division were those whose mother (tended to) have the final say in decisions. This could indicate that in these cases, "gender-atypical" family constellations that were not constructed along lines of "male dominance" influenced perceptions of gender roles in a more egalitarian direction. However, this cannot be further explained by the data.

No statistical differences can be identified in terms of a balanced distribution of care work within the partnership and decision-making power in the family of origin (see table header). However, differences can be observed when the analysis is broken down by gender: among female respondents, an imbalance in decision-making power in the family of origin has a

negative effect on the balanced distribution of care work. However, due to the small number of cases, these statements should only be understood as possible trends.

The link between attitudes and behaviour has been examined in numerous studies. As already seen in section 3.1, the vast majority of respondents reject a "traditional" division of roles, although this is only reflected to a limited extent in the actual distribution of unpaid and paid work. When a balanced division of household and care work is compared with the attitude variables, less clear correlations emerge.

In line with expectations, a balance in housework is most frequently observed among those who reject the male provider and female caregiver roles. If respondents strongly disagree with the statement that a mother with young children should not go out to work, 22% divide housework equally. Among those who strongly agree with this statement, this applies to around 8%. The results are similar for the statement that men* should be the breadwinners: 24% experience housework as balanced and reject this gender role model – however, if they agree with it, only 9% share housework equally.

The correlation is less clear when it comes to the statement that a woman* should be financially independent of a man*. Although those who agree with this statement most often experience balance – this applies to around 18% – the proportion of those who disagree completely is only 2 percentage points lower. It can be concluded that this specific attitude variable has little or no influence on the balance of unpaid housework (see Figure 24).

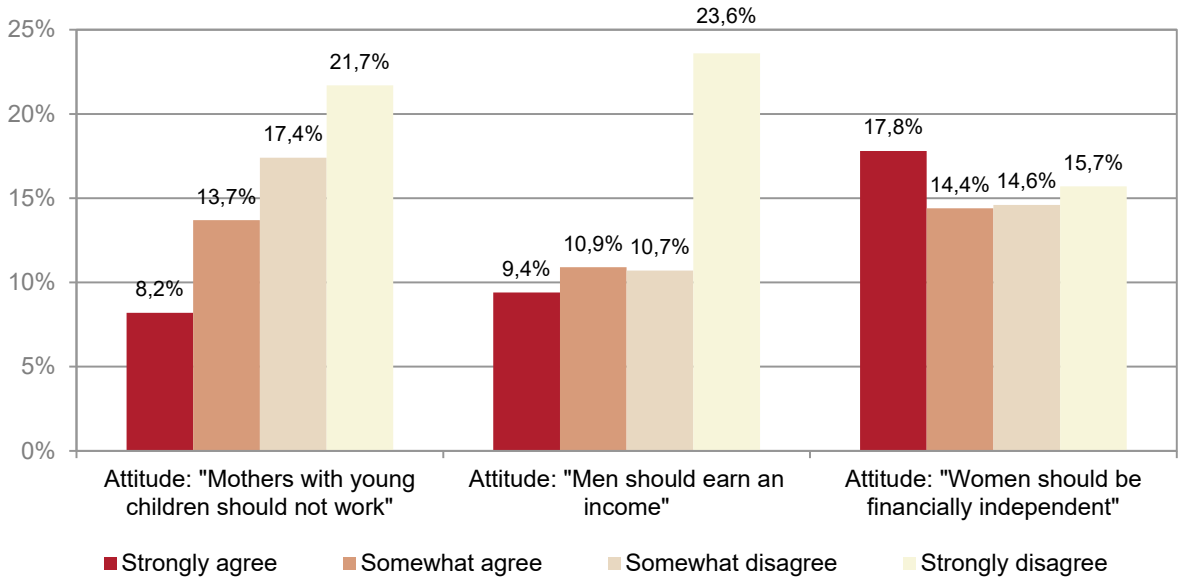



**Figure 24 : Attitudes towards "traditional" gender roles and balanced housework**

Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,597; n miss between 90 and 120, weighted sample.

However, the picture is quite different when it comes to care work: here, it is mainly those respondents who believe that young mothers should not work or that men should be the

breadwinners who report a balanced division of labour. Analyses broken down by gender point to possible differences in impact: Among female respondents, support for a "traditional" female caregiving role has a negative effect on a balanced division of labour, while among male respondents, support for the male breadwinner ideal has a negative effect. However, the small number of cases does not allow for any firm conclusions to be drawn.

#### Interim conclusion: Structural inequalities and relationship dynamics

The well-documented link between paid and unpaid work is also confirmed by our study. Furthermore, it is clear that this link has different effects depending on gender: while women* who work more hours than their partners still take on the majority of unpaid work, this is not the case for male respondents. Furthermore, women* benefit from their partners working the same amount or more in terms of a balanced division of household and care work, with women* who work longer hours themselves most often reporting a balanced division of childcare responsibilities. This picture is confirmed by the fact that male respondents most often divide care work equally when they themselves work less.

The quantitative analyses also suggest that there is a link between caring behaviour and a balanced division of unpaid work. It shows that those respondents who rate themselves and their partner as equally caring are particularly likely to divide housework and care work equally within their partnership. The same applies to balanced decision-making power within the partnership.

When it comes to intergenerational effects – specifically decision-making processes in the family of origin – less clear conclusions can be drawn. The same applies to attitudes towards gender role models: on the one hand, the rejection of the male breadwinner and female caregiver model promotes a balance in the division of domestic work, but on the other hand, the contradictory findings on care work mean that there is no clear correlation. However, gender-specific analyses suggest that diverging effects between male and female respondents could explain these results.

Furthermore, it becomes particularly clear that gender-equal couple relationships cannot be determined on the basis of selected factors, but rather that a complex dynamic of individual, institutional and social circumstances interact without clear causal relationships being apparent. In the following chapters, this complexity will be examined in more detail on the basis of the qualitative analyses.

### 3.3.5 In-depth analysis using case studies – matched pairs

The following section examines the conditions and factors influencing gender-equitable and gender-inequitable division of labour in detail using two matched pair examples. The aim of these comparisons is to identify the factors that promote a balanced distribution of resources (decisions, paid work, care work) as well as those that lead to an unbalanced distribution. This

is based on the assumption that social inequalities become entrenched or break down, particularly in the everyday lives of couples and families, along personal, relationship-related, organisational and societal dimensions.

A "match" consists of two cases that are comparable in terms of family background – particularly with regard to the traditional division of labour and conflict resolution – and can be parallelised on the basis of social markers such as age, gender, place of residence, origin and education. In the present – in their own family or partnership – however, there are clear differences: while one person lives in a more equal model, the other is involved in an unequal, often gender-stereotypical arrangement.

After presenting the respective couples, the study systematically analyses which factors contribute to the development of equality or inequality at four levels: onto (individual experiences and attitudes), micro (social relationships and interactions), meso (organisations, work, neighbourhood, local networks and projects) and macro (societal conditions). Using original quotes and close links to the interview material, the aim is to reveal how biographical experiences, structural contexts and personal decisions interact in everyday life – and which conditions enable or hinder gender-equitable living conditions.

### Matched Pair I

Person A and Person B can be compared as a "matched pair" because they have similar backgrounds based on key social markers: both are women, are of a similar age, grew up in rural areas of Austria and currently live in rural areas. They have tertiary education and live in heterosexual partnerships with two children. There are also overlaps with regard to their families of origin. Both families belong to the working class, with only minor economic and cultural differences (e.g. Person B's father comes from a farming background). Both individuals completed university degrees; Person A is a librarian and Person B is a social worker. A detailed look at the specific circumstances within their families of origin reveals the different experiences the two individuals had growing up and, on the other hand, and this is what makes this pair unique, the different ways they dealt with major crises and the long-term effects these had on their lives.

The life paths of Person A and Person B show both parallels and clear differences, particularly in terms of gender equality and the way they deal with crises. Both individuals grew up in a fundamentally stable environment where they had a good childhood. For Person A, their father was an important role model, especially with regard to taking on care work, while for Person B, their mother was heavily involved in care work. Despite their stable starting points, the lives of both individuals changed as a result of formative crisis experiences that had a significant impact on their future careers. While Person A initially grew up in a relatively gender-equal environment, where she had a strong bond with her father and a stable network of friends, she was torn from this situation by the death of her mother at the age of 16. From this point on, her life took a turn towards gender inequality. She increasingly found herself in a role that allowed little self-determination – she dropped out of university, moved to the countryside and took on a traditional housewife role, even though she had originally aspired to a different way of

life. The turning point in her life came when she was diagnosed with cancer at the age of 40, which prompted her to actively work on her situation and increasingly free herself from rigid role expectations.

In comparison, Person B also had a good childhood but was confronted with violence at an early age when she witnessed her best friend's father being seriously injured. This experience was formative but not directly related to her own family. Her own family background was characterised by a competitive dynamic between her mother and father, which led her to develop an inner conflict, especially in her relationship with her father. Nevertheless, her life was generally more positive and stable than that of Person A. She developed a high level of resilience, which enabled her to cope well with difficult situations. Unlike Person A, she made conscious decisions that allowed her greater autonomy. She studied social work, met a partner who embodied many aspects of "caring masculinity," and had an equal relationship in which household and care work were shared between partners.

The way the two individuals dealt with crises also shows clear differences. Person A went through several profound crises that had a lasting impact on her life. The loss of her mother in her teenage years was a particularly formative experience that led her to take on adult responsibilities at an early age. As her father was emotionally unable to stabilise the family after her mother's death, Person A took on a role that went beyond her actual stage of life. Instead of developing freely during her youth, she was confronted with coping with her father's depression and had to take on responsibility. This led her to suppress her own emotions for years and only regain access to them much later, through therapy.

In contrast, Person B also had a formative crisis experience but was able to process it with the support of a stable social environment. A traumatic experience in her youth – witnessing a serious act of violence – led to an intense examination of the subject of violence. Nevertheless, Person B had stronger resilience mechanisms to deal with this experience. While Person A coped with crises by withdrawing and suppressing feelings, Person B found support in family and friendship networks and in active coping strategies such as music and spending time in nature.

The effects of these different experiences are also evident in the later life choices of the two individuals. Person A found herself in a traditional gender division within her own family, which she increasingly found burdensome.

Person A moves to another state, away from her network of friends, and relatively quickly (at the age of 20) meets her partner. He comes from a rather gender-conservative world (traditional gender roles) and lives in the countryside. Just one year later (she is 21), they move together to a small town in the countryside. This is a major upheaval: in her eyes, she is taking a big step towards dependence – the consequences manifest themselves in a life crisis, among other things. She drops out of her studies, has no further plans for her life, finds herself in a place where she does not really want to be, in a relationship in which she receives (too) little support. Person A does not really want children, but after a year of discussion with her partner (who does want children), she decides to have them. The consequences of this decision prove

to be a major challenge. The legal and social systems limit her and her partner even more than they would have liked.

Dropping out of university, growing into the role of housewife and mother, and living in a rather conservative rural environment led to a feeling of alienation and dependence. It was only through serious illness that she was able to free herself from these structures and began to actively shape her life according to her own ideas. The turning point came with a cancer diagnosis at the age of 40. This crisis activated deeper resources within her: she began therapy, trained for a new career and changed both her relationship with herself and with her family. She describes a "change of perspective" – away from a worst-case strategy to an attitude that lives more in the moment, lets go and seeks room for manoeuvre. This development can be interpreted as emancipation: she renegotiates responsibility, is more active again and no longer allows herself to be reduced to the role of mother. Violence no longer plays an active role but continues to be part of her history in the form of previous excessive demands and suppressed emotions.

Person B, on the other hand, took conscious steps early on to build a life based on partnership. She made deliberate decisions that allowed her a high degree of independence, such as choosing a career in the social sector and sharing care work equally with her partner.

Person B also describes moving in with their partner, maintaining strong ties with their circle of friends and continuing to work. Person B studied social work, met their partner (who works as a carer and has high expectations of caring masculinity), had children, which they both wanted, and shares the paid work and care work equally between them. The description shows an equal partnership in which tasks and responsibilities are openly communicated and flexibly shared. The partner actively takes on household and family tasks such as cooking, shopping and looking after the children, and has independently expressed a desire to take longer parental leave, which has enriched the family relationship. It is not a problem if he takes care leave or puts the children to bed. The partner's professional and personal freedom, such as taking a sabbatical or travelling alone, is supported and valued. This balance allows her to pursue her own interests. Household tasks are divided fairly. The equal attitude and feminist approach create a partnership of equals characterised by trust, respect and openness. This model shows how equality can work in everyday life and how everyone benefits from it.

Here is a comparative table of the factors that contribute to an unequal distribution of resources for Person A and an equal distribution of resources for Person B – differentiated according to the onto, micro, meso and macro levels:

**Table3: Matched Pair I – Unequal vs. equal distribution**

| Level | A – unbalanced distribution | B – balanced distribution |
|---|---|---|
| **ONTO (individual level)** | – Early loss of mother, early assumption of responsibility<br>– Worst-case thinking, need for control<br>– Late treatment through therapy<br>– Desire for autonomy suppressed for a long time | – Personality trait: assertive, courageous<br>– Early development of resilience strategies (music, conversation, nature)<br>– Optimistic attitude, positive crisis management |
| **MICRO (close social relationships)** | – Partner from a conservative background<br>– Relationship initially very asymmetrical: she is a housewife, he works full-time<br>– Conflicts are loud but not violent<br>– Long-standing overload in care work | – Equal relationship<br>– Partner with "caring masculinity"<br>– Task distribution is planned and flexibly adjusted<br>– Open, respectful communication |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **MESO (organisations)** | – Discontinuation of studies due to child and care work<br>– Library set up on a voluntary basis, later revised<br>– Lack of institutional support in early stages of motherhood | – Employer supports sabbaticals and further training<br>– Equality in parental leave, care leave, etc.<br>– Division of labour with support from family (mother-in-law) |
| **MACRO (social framework conditions)** | – Strong gender bias in rural areas<br>– Lack of childcare and unfair maternity leave regulations at the time of birth<br>– Dependency relationships (economic, social) | – More progressive legal framework (e.g. longer paternity leave possible)<br>– Feminist understanding of gender roles is more widely accepted in society<br>– Good work-life balance thanks to existing structures |

This table clearly shows that Person A remained in a state of limited capacity to act for a long time due to a combination of biographical disruptions, limited networks, traditional partnership structures and structural deficits. It was only through serious illness and therapeutic processes that she regained a certain degree of self-determination.

Person B, on the other hand, can draw on a stable personal foundation and supportive structures at all levels – she has enjoyed an equal division of labour from the outset and benefits from a reflective partner and a supportive institutional and social environment. The sum of these factors enables her to achieve a high degree of self-efficacy and equality in her everyday life.

In summary, both individuals were confronted with gender inequalities but reacted differently to them. While Person A initially allowed themselves to be pushed into traditional role patterns and only found a way out of them late in life, Person B was able to establish a more equal way of life at an early stage. The differences are also clear in how they deal with crises: while Person A was long dominated by the past and control over possible negative events, Person B developed a resilient attitude that enabled her to see challenges as a learning process and to shape them proactively.

Person B has also experienced crises – such as witnessing a violent crime in their youth and physical assaults in the workplace. However, they developed resilience strategies, using their family network, music, nature and conversation to process their experiences and give themselves space to retreat. Violence is not an issue in her current relationship – rather, she consciously distances herself from it, critically reflects on the violence in her family of origin and adopts new, non-violent patterns in dealing with intimacy, conflict and responsibility.

Both women face challenges – but in different ways. While Person A only begins to free herself from a passive role after decades of feeling overwhelmed and having to adapt, Person B lives an active, self-determined and equal life from the outset.  , violence plays a greater role as a

biographical shadow and expression of early powerlessness, while for Person B it remains part of the past and is not carried over into the present. Ultimately, it is the available resources – within the family, personal and structural – as well as the ability to reflect on oneself that make the difference in dealing with challenges.

### Matched Pair II

Person C and Person D can be compared as a "matched pair" because they have similar backgrounds in terms of key social characteristics and their families of origin. Both are middle-aged men who grew up in rural areas of Austria, now live in urban areas, have tertiary education and work in the education sector – Person C as a trainer for apprentices and Person D as a teacher. While Person C comes from a rural background and Person D from a working-class background, the material does not reveal any significant economic or cultural differences. Neither man has a migration background, and both move in similar social circles.

Their families of origin are also comparable in structure: in both cases, the mother was primarily responsible for care work, while the father worked outside the home. Both men report a caring but authoritarian upbringing, in which physical punishment by their mother was common. Conflicts within the families tended to be avoided or negotiated indirectly – there was a lack of open, emotionally accessible communication. Despite these structural similarities, the individual experiences, influences and subsequent life courses of the two men are very different.

A detailed look at their families of origin shows that while Person C grew up in a patriarchal, multi-generational household where authority was not questioned, Person D experienced a more open family atmosphere with dialogue-based parenting and early involvement in decision-making. These differences in family communication and conflict resolution are clearly reflected in their current life realities. The analytical comparison of these two biographically and socially comparable men thus provides insightful insights into the question of how similar starting conditions can lead to very different forms of partnership, division of labour, conflict resolution and dealing with violence. A central connecting element in both biographies is the strong bond with their families of origin. Both report a fundamental feeling of care during their childhood – in Person C's case in the form of reliability and security in a multi-generational household, and in Person D's case in the form of an active and inclusive family atmosphere. Both also share the experience of physical punishment by their mothers during their childhood – in Person C's case as isolated incidents, in Person D's case as a consistent parenting measure, without this violence escalating systematically or massively. In both cases, the fathers are rather passive, although Person C describes a particularly close relationship with his father.

There are also parallels in terms of communication – in both families, there are certain topics that are excluded or not discussed openly. While Person C describes a pronounced culture of silence and endurance, Person D speaks of fundamental openness, but also explicitly mentions situations in which certain decisions were made without involvement or emotional distance was noticeable.

The most striking differences lie in the extent of gender-specific influences and in the response to family challenges. Person C grows up in a patriarchal, multi-generational household in which

the grandfather is the centre of power and all family members must submit to his authority. Decisions are non-negotiable and alternative lifestyles are not an option. Gender roles are clearly defined, and emotional needs and individual concerns are not openly communicated. Conflicts are not addressed but rather ignored – a pattern that Person C internalises and later carries forward themselves.

In contrast, Person D grows up in a family environment where traditional role patterns also exist, but these are actively questioned and partially broken down. The mother sees herself as a feminist, pursues a clear life plan, involves her children in care tasks from an early age and teaches values such as personal responsibility and openness. Decisions, especially those that directly affect the child, are negotiated through dialogue. This attitude promotes a stable self-image and a high level of resilience to later challenges in Person D.

While Person C describes ambivalence, insecurity and emotional speechlessness several times in their biography – not least as a result of a suppressed family history with possible transgenerational trauma – Person D develops a clear relationship with themselves and their family past. He critically reflects on what he wants to adopt (e.g. his parents' role model relationship, renunciation of violence) and what he wants to distance himself from.

Overall, it is clear that both individuals grew up with gender-specific role expectations, but experienced and processed them very differently. While Person C was shaped by a close-knit, authoritarian family system that left little room for individual development, Person D benefited from an open, albeit not conflict-free, parental home that allowed for early self-determination. These different family backgrounds are also reflected in the current realities of both individuals' lives: Person C struggles with traditional patterns and is only finding steps towards emancipation through personal crises and therapeutic exploration. Person D, on the other hand, was able to build an equal partnership early on and now lives in a largely gender-equal family constellation.

In the current life situations of Person C and Person D, there are clear differences in the distribution of key life resources – in particular work, care work and decision-making power. While Person D strives for and has partially achieved a largely equal division of labour with their (new) partner, Person C – despite processes of reflection – largely reproduces traditional gender relations in which responsibility and decision-making power are unevenly distributed.

Person C appears to live in a partnership in which traditional role models prevail: his partner is primarily responsible for the household and children, while he – despite flexible working hours – only provides occasional support ("*helper on call*"). Care work is largely associated with women, and emotional responsibilities also lie primarily with the woman. Person C makes most decisions – especially material and strategic ones – himself. For example, he owns real estate, which gives him room for manoeuvre, while his partner only has access to resources, she has earned herself. Conflicts in the relationship are also asymmetrical: negotiations seem rare, and issues are often left unspoken or inadequately addressed. The way they organise their life together is strongly influenced by his family of origin – decisions such as moving to the

countryside to be closer to family follow old patterns and make it difficult to develop new, more equal forms of negotiation.

The factors behind this unequal distribution lie, on the one hand, in the social conditioning of Person C: growing up in a patriarchal, multi-generational household where authority was not questioned but accepted, he never learned to negotiate conflicts openly or to live in an equal partnership. On the other hand, a certain degree of inability to take care of himself also plays a role – whether in terms of everyday routines such as cooking or in building sustainable networks outside his family of origin. Although Person C has undergone a process of reflection over the years (e.g. through cancer) and strives for change, this has so far remained fragmentary and has not fundamentally broken down the structural inequality.

Person D, on the other hand, shows a strong commitment to equality in their current lifestyle. After separating from their ex-partner – triggered by different coping strategies following the death of a child – they now live in a new partnership with shared responsibilities. They and their partner both work full-time, and care work is organised flexibly, for example through working from home or with the support of a cleaner. With regard to the care of his son, Person D describes a clear sense of responsibility and active involvement. Decisions – such as choosing a school – are made jointly with all those involved, including the child. Conflicts in the relationship are also addressed consciously and with mutual respect, despite different personality patterns.

There are many factors at play here: on the one hand, Person D benefits from a stable personal foundation laid in his childhood. He was involved in decisions from an early age and learned personal responsibility and participatory communication. His mother, who considered herself a feminist, lived an ambivalent but deliberately chosen role model in which care work was taken on but also strategically divided and limited in time. On the other hand, Person D has resiliently mastered multiple crises (e.g. burnouts, experiences of violence in their environment) and has learned to actively address problems and not remain stuck in outdated patterns. They demonstrate a high degree of self-reflection and are willing to take responsibility for themselves and others. This enables them to realise equality not only as an ideal, but as a lived practice.

While Person C, despite their willingness to reflect and good intentions, finds it difficult to break out of the traditional patterns of their family of origin, Person D succeeds in achieving an equal lifestyle through a stable self-image, communication skills and conscious partner choice. It becomes clear that equality is not only enabled or prevented at the level of values, but above all through concrete scope for action, biographical resources and structural support.

Here is a comparative table of the factors that contribute to an unequal distribution of resources in Person C and an equal distribution of resources in Person D, differentiated according to the ontological, micro, meso and macro levels:

**Table4: Matched Pair II – unbalanced vs. balanced distribution**

| Level | C – unbalanced distribution | D – balanced distribution |
|---|---|---|
| **ONTO (individual level)** | – Grew up in a patriarchal multi-generational household<br>– Raised in a silent, violent family culture<br>– Ambivalence: desire for change, but uncertainty about how to implement it<br>– Difficulties in openly resolving conflicts or communicating emotions<br>– Reflection present, implementation stalling | – Stable self-image thanks to open but clear upbringing<br>– Resilience through experiences of crisis (e.g. burnout, death of a child)<br>– Ability to reflect on oneself and actively shape one's life<br>– Violence consciously addressed, distancing from violent patterns |
| **MICRO (close social relationships)** | – Relationship with unequal division of labour (she cares, he works)<br>– He takes on tasks selectively ("helper on call")<br>– Conflicts tend to be avoided or left unspoken<br>– Low emotional involvement in family decision-making processes<br>– Partially boundary-violating behaviour towards children (not trivialised) | – Partnership-based relationship (him and new partner)<br>– 50:50 model for childcare<br>– Joint decision-making, including with the child<br>– Conflicts are addressed openly and resolved constructively<br>– Active fatherhood and equal responsibility |
| **MESO (organisations)** | – Professionally established, but care work not structurally considered<br>– Flexibility is possible but is not used to redistribute work<br>– Lack of impetus from the world of work to make everyday life more gender-equitable | – Transition from IT manager to teacher<br>– Active lifestyle<br>– Career reorientation after burnout<br>– Home office and flexible working hours enable the sharing of care responsibilities<br>– Employers and environment support equal life models |
| **MACRO (social framework conditions)** | – Traditional role models internalised through origin and place of residence<br>– Social expectations of "traditional male roles" influence scope for action<br>– Property ownership reinforces power asymmetry | – Use of legal options (parental leave, flexible childcare)<br>– Socially accepted discourse on gender equality in urban environments<br>– Feminist attitude also shared by partner and supported by society |

The table clearly shows that Person C grew up in a family and social environment that promoted traditional gender roles and an emotionally restrictive communication climate. Although they reflect on their own role, they have only made fragmentary progress towards a more equitable division of labour and responsibility. Stressful family dynamics and a lack of role models for cooperative behaviour reinforce this effect.

Person D, on the other hand, was able to achieve an equal life model through a combination of open family influences, resilience in dealing with crises, conscious choice of partner and structured professional reorientation. Social openness, but also personal attitude and communication skills play a central role in this.

This breakdown clearly shows how complex and multifaceted the conditions for fair or unfair distribution of resources are – and that change can only succeed if all levels, from the personal to the structural, work together.

With regard to conflict management, Person C is currently facing a series of complex challenges in his life that are both structural and emotional in nature. He lives with his partner and two children in an environment characterised by traditional gender roles. He finds the lack of equal distribution of responsibility particularly stressful, both in terms of care work and emotional relationship work. His partner takes on most of the day-to-day organisation, while he describes himself as supportive, but usually only takes action "*when things get urgent*". This unequal division of labour leads to recurring tensions and conflicts in the relationship, which he himself describes as challenging. In dealing with these challenges, Person C displays an ambivalent pattern: on the one hand, he recognises his own behaviour patterns, reflects on his family background and talks about guilt, shame and feelings of failure – for example, when he was unable to respect his child's boundaries or became "too rough" in an argument. On the other hand, he often remains passive or looks for reasons outside himself, such as in circumstances or the "*temptations of the big city*." It is striking that he rarely actively resolves conflicts but rather seems to avoid or ignore them. At the same time, he repeatedly talks about his longing for peace and retreat, which further prevents him from making constructive changes.

Violence definitely plays a role here. Person C reports situations in which he held his child down or pushed him away – actions that he himself considers abusive. He describes these as "*not physically hurtful, but not nice*", associated with shame and the feeling of "*not having done better*". These descriptions indicate that violence in subtle, transgressive forms continues to be part of his relationships – as a result of insufficiently processed biographical experiences and a lack of tools for dealing with stress and conflict. At the same time, it is noteworthy that he does not trivialise these actions, but reflects on them critically – which in turn can be seen as a potential starting point for change.

Person D, on the other hand, is facing his current challenges with a much more active, solution-oriented approach. After a painful separation from his ex-partner – triggered by different ways of dealing with grief after the death of their second child – he now lives in a new relationship with shared responsibilities. Custody of their son has been organised on a partnership basis (50:50 model), with physical proximity to his ex-partner deliberately accepted in order to

provide stability for the child. In the new relationship, the division of paid work, household organisation and childcare is flexible and largely equal.

Person D faces challenges – such as professional overload or relationship dynamics – with a high degree of self-reflection. Two burnouts led to radical career changes, which he actively shaped by switching to a career as a teacher. In conflicts within his partnership, he also demonstrates his ability to identify tensions and, depending on the situation, to maintain distance or work towards joint solutions. It is noticeable that he does not tend to escalate conflicts but accepts them as part of everyday life and deals with them constructively.

Violence does not play an active role in his current life. Person D reports neither abusive behaviour towards himself nor that he uses violence. On the contrary, he explicitly refers to values such as openness and non-violence, which he says he has taken from his family of origin – even though he himself experienced physical violence (a slap in the face) from his mother as a child. He has processed this experience and transformed it into a personal ideal: he does not want to hit his own children – a conscious departure from his parents' parenting methods. This attitude is also reflected in his current family life, which is characterised by emotional stability, a sense of responsibility and transparent communication.

In summary, it can be said that both individuals are confronted with challenges – Person C with intra-family conflicts and unresolved role issues, Person D with complex life changes and multiple stresses. While Person D draws on resilience, open communication and self-reflective action, Person C often remains stuck in traditional patterns and struggles with feelings of powerlessness, which manifest themselves in conflictual and potentially boundary-violating behaviour. Violence is an issue for Person C – not so much as a dominant pattern, but as an expression of emotional overload and a lack of alternative courses of action. For Person D, on the other hand, violence is clearly marked as a boundary that they neither want to cross nor pass on to others.

## 3.4 Factors contributing to gender equality: What helps?

Promoting a balanced distribution of resources requires profound changes in social structures, individual attitudes and institutional frameworks. This chapter examines factors that promote gender equality, i.e. equality between the sexes, which emerged in the interviews and can contribute to an equal society. A distinction is made between the onto, micro, meso and macro levels, which, however, are constantly intertwined and cannot be understood as clearly separate from one another.

At the onto level (section 3.4.1), the intrapersonal individual level, we look at internal factors such as progressive gender roles, the ability to change perspectives, the "*life is more than work*" attitude, care orientation (including self-care), means of reflection and transgenerational transmission of fundamental feminist values. At the micro level (section 3.4.2), the interpersonal level, influencing factors such as the external, informal support network, conscious planning of the division of labour and care work before the birth of the child, encouraging spaces for

negotiation and vulnerability, illness as a "*window of opportunity*" and "*care for relationships*" are considered.

At the meso level (section 3.4.3), the level of institutional framework conditions, institutional factors such as community projects, caring companies, awareness-raising through education and professional counselling services are examined. Finally, at the macro level (section 3.4.4), the level of overall social structures and framework conditions, influencing factors such as needs-based, formal childcare, no income disparities, labour market demand and pensions as a "*window of opportunity*" are discussed.

In a digression in this chapter 3.4, the influencing factors in the opposite direction – influencing factors towards gender inequality from the GEQ-AT interviews – are discussed. Here, too, a distinction is made between the four levels (onto-, micro-, meso- and macro-level).

But first, here is a chart providing an overview of the various factors that promote gender equality:

**Table5: Overview table of factors contributing to gender equality derived from the GEQ-AT interviews.**

| **ONTO**<br>**(individual level)** | **MICRO**<br>**(close social relationships)** |
|---|---|
| – Progressive gender role attitudes<br>– Ability to understand different points of view<br>– "Life is more than work"<br>– Care orientation (including self-care)<br>– Ways of reflection<br>– Transgenerational transmission of fundamental feminist values<br>– Personal attitudes & skills: self-efficacy, critical thinking and willingness to develop<br>– Illness as a window of opportunity | – External, informal support network<br>– Conscious planning of division of labour and care work before the birth of the child<br>– Encouraging spaces for negotiation & vulnerability<br>– "Care for relationships"<br>– Relationship building & everyday practice – supportive, open communication, flexible, respectful of boundaries |
| **MESO**<br>**(organisations)** | **MACRO**<br>**(social framework conditions)** |
| – Community projects<br>– Caring Companies<br>– Raising awareness through education<br>– Professional counselling services<br>– Networks for gender equality | – Needs-based, formal childcare<br>– No income disparities<br>– Demand in the labour market<br>– Pension as a window of opportunity<br>– Political legitimacy of diverse family forms & legal regulations for equal parental leave |

**Influencing Factors Direction Equality**

### 3.4.1 Factors influencing equality at the onto level

#### Progressive gender roles

Progressive gender roles contribute to a balanced distribution of resources and care work, as they challenge traditional role patterns and enable a flexible and fair distribution of paid work and care work. While traditional gender roles still dominate in all social classes, with men considered the main breadwinners and women primarily responsible for care work, a progressive attitude offers the opportunity to break these patterns and reduce gender-specific disadvantages. Some of the interviews conducted show that people who advocate gender equality also deal with issues of division of labour and responsibility in practical terms:

> "*I currently live with my partner in an apartment. There are two of us.* (...) *We are very, very equal and responsible. I would say equally responsible. That's actually something I value very much.*"
>
> (16 JS, female, 31)

This attitude leads people to question traditional divisions and actively seek fair solutions. However, even though most interviewees with progressive gender roles demonstrate a balanced division of labour, this is not necessarily a prerequisite for the development of a balanced division of resources. There are exceptions, for example when illness requires the other parent to be involved (see below, Illness as a "*window of opportunity*") and a progressive attitude towards gender roles develops as a result of taking on care work. Cause and effect are reversed in this case.

Furthermore, progressive gender roles do not necessarily mean that they are implemented in everyday life. Some interviews reveal a discrepancy between the desire for gender equality and its actual implementation. This can lead to cognitive dissonance, i.e. an internal conflict between values, roles and behaviour. In some cases, this cognitive dissonance can contribute to conflicts and violence in relationships.

#### Ability to understand different points of view

The ability to understand different points of view contributes to the promotion of a balanced distribution of resources, as it enables people to better understand gender-related experiences, inequalities and structural barriers. By actively taking the perspective of people who are disadvantaged because of their gender, stereotypical ideas can be questioned, discriminatory structures identified, and equality processes initiated.

A key element of changing perspectives is becoming aware of privileges and disadvantages. One interviewee describes how her partner's change in perspective led him to become more involved in childcare: "*At some point, he understood that I don't automatically have to be the one who organises everything. It was only when he had full responsibility himself that he saw how much work it is*" *(45 JS, female, 41)*. This experience shows that a change of perspective is often triggered by personal experiences. When men take on care responsibilities, for example,

they develop a deeper understanding of structural inequalities and take responsibility for a fairer distribution of work and tasks.

In one of the interviews conducted, the ability to change perspectives is explicitly described as a decisive factor in resolving conflicts in a spirit of partnership. One man describes how, by consciously adopting his partner's point of view, he was able to stop viewing conflicts from a self-centred perspective and instead understand her needs:

> "*By trying to put myself in my wife's shoes and understand her perspective, I can see why she sees certain things differently. I am then no longer fixated on my own solution, but work with her to find a way that works for both of us.*"
>
> (17 ES, male, 76)

This kind of empathy and relativisation of one's own point of view enabled solutions to be negotiated on an equal footing within the relationship. Instead of maintaining power imbalances or traditional role models, joint decision-making processes are promoted.

In addition, the ability to change perspectives can contribute to greater gender equality in institutional contexts. Managers who reflect on the different challenges faced by employees with care responsibilities are more willing to implement measures such as flexible working hours, fair pay or mentoring programmes for women.

Another aspect is interaction between generations, especially within families. When older generations put themselves in the shoes of women who have to balance work and family, there is greater acceptance of a more equitable division of labour. One interviewee describes how her father developed a new perspective on gender roles by observing his daughter:

> "*My father always believed that women should primarily take care of the family. It was only when he saw how much I was torn between work and children that he understood that this was not working.*"
>
> (50 OP, female, 61)

The ability to change perspectives makes gender-related inequalities visible and stimulates personal reflection. It promotes a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by marginalised groups, enables equal conflict resolution in partnerships and contributes to actively questioning traditional role models.

### "Life is more than work"

The idea that fulfilment in life is not defined exclusively by gainful employment and career contributes to a balanced distribution of resources. The attitude that "*life is more than just gainful employment and career*" is particularly associated with male respondents who are more involved in care work, without this being perceived as a professional or social disadvantage. The norms of hegemonic masculinity (cf. Connell & Messerschmidt 2005), which define masculinity primarily in terms of performance and success in the workplace, put pressure on men* to construct their identity through their gainful employment. This leads to care work being considered secondary. Men* who have internalised this attitude see no need to participate in

care work to a balanced extent. One interviewee describes the change that came with letting go of this one-sided prioritisation of paid work:

> "*My husband realised at some point that it's not just about who earns how much. He wanted to spend time with the children, so he reduced his hours. That has been good for us as a family.*"
>
> (45 JS, female, 41)

This statement shows that men* who do not view gainful employment as the sole source of identity and success are more willing to reduce their working hours or take advantage of flexible working models in order to participate more in care work.

Another example shows that such an attitude can also arise from an intrinsic motivation for gender equality. One interviewee describes how, in addition to his paid work, he has gained a lot of joy in life from care and household activities. He describes a fulfilling life by emphasising relationship-oriented experiences in various fields, including family, friendship, paid work and voluntary work: "*I have always made sure that I don't just live for my job. The best moments in my life were not in the office, but when I was able to be there for others*" *(17 ES, male, 76)*. This attitude shows that an equal division of labour can arise not only from external constraints, but also from personal conviction. Those who see relationship orientation as a valuable part of their own lives are more likely to actively participate in care work rather than viewing it as a feminised task or subordinate activity.

At the same time, women* benefit from this attitude, as they can pursue professional ambitions without feeling alone in the traditional conflict between family and career. In most partnerships, however, the main responsibility for childcare and household organisation still falls to women*, even if they are employed. However, if gainful employment is not seen as the sole measure of success, a partnership-based division of tasks can emerge that makes it easier for women* to take advantage of career opportunities and secure long-term financial independence.

Another example of the influence of this attitude can be seen in the retirement phase. Men who have defined themselves strongly through their careers often face identity conflicts when this role disappears. Those who have developed a broader view of quality of life, on the other hand, find it easier to engage in care work, family relationships and social engagement in retirement. One interview participant describes how this change manifested itself in her family: "*My father was always career-focused, but in retirement he realised for the first time that he had missed out on a lot. He is a completely different person now with his grandchildren*" *(50 OP, female, 61).* This development shows that a change in perspective – away from an identity centred on gainful employment – can also soften long-term social role models.

In summary, the attitude that "*life is more than just work and career*" promotes gender equality by questioning rigid gender-specific expectations of paid work and care work. It enables men* to actively participate in care work and family life without this being perceived as a loss of social status and makes it easier for women* to participate equally in the labour market. Those who understand care work as a valuable part of a fulfilling life not only contribute to their own

quality of life, but also to a more equitable distribution of paid work and care work. This perspective helps to enable a partnership-based approach to life.

### Care orientation (including self-care)

A care orientation that encompasses both caring for others and self-care contributes to promoting a balanced distribution of resources, as it challenges traditional gender roles and enables a partnership-based distribution of care work and paid work. An example of care orientation in practice can be found in an interview in which both partners subordinate paid work to care work.

> *"We both took the same amount of parental leave after the birth of our child and then reduced our working hours. It was important to us that family came first and that we shared the care work equally."*
>
> (33 OP, female, 35)

This decision shows that care work can be seen as a shared responsibility of both parents. Such an attitude helps to ensure that women* do not necessarily become economically dependent, while men* can build closer bonds with their children.

In addition to care orientation in relation to children and partnership, self-care also plays an important role. Care work is often associated with high mental and emotional stress, which is particularly evident in those who, in addition to their paid work, also bear the main responsibility for the family. A partnership-based care orientation therefore takes into account not only the division of childcare and household chores, but also allowing each other time for themselves. "*My husband and I make sure that everyone has enough time for themselves. Whether it's for sports, meeting friends or just taking a break from everyday family life*" *(33 OP, female, 35).* This attitude is also reflected in other interviews:

> *"In our family, it's important that we give each other the opportunity to take time for ourselves. It's about give and take, so that one person doesn't always have to shoulder everything."*
>
> (02 OP, female, 39)

In summary, a care-oriented approach, including self-care, promotes gender equality by questioning traditional role divisions, dividing care work between partners and recognising self-care as an important part of an equal life. This attitude helps to reduce the double burden on women*, make it easier for men to access care work and create a balance between caring for others and self-care. This results in a way of life that promotes not only economic independence but also a more equitable distribution of time and responsibility.

### Ways of reflection

Self-reflection contributes to promoting a balanced distribution of resources, as it enables individuals to question gender-specific socialisation, role models and their own behaviour patterns. By examining their own experiences, emotions and social expectations, individuals can

develop an awareness of structural inequalities that leads to changes in personal and social behaviour. Both personal ways of reflection and professional support services play a role in this process.

Reading, drawing and other forms of expressing feelings can trigger reflection processes by opening up new perspectives or making emotions tangible. Reading feminist or socially critical literature in particular can help individuals to question their own conditioning and discover alternative ways of thinking. One interviewee describes how examining the biographies of women in her family helped her to recognise transgenerational patterns of gender inequality:

> "*I have dealt intensively with the life stories of my female ancestors. I realised how many restrictions they had to endure and how this affects my own life.*"
>
> (22 ES, female, 48)

In addition to reading, creative forms of expression such as drawing or journaling can also help to process emotions and reflect on social influences. These approaches encourage a deeper examination of gender roles and personal experiences and help to expand individual scope for action.

In addition to such individual avenues for reflection, professional services (e.g. psychotherapy) can help to question internalised gender norms and release emotional blockages. In an interview, one person describes how depth psychology therapy helped them to break old role patterns and open up new scope for action:

> "*Through therapy, I understood why I always felt obliged to carry everything on my own. I realised that I had never questioned care work but simply taken it on. That only changed when I learned to set boundaries.*"
>
> (49 OP, male, 47)

Psychotherapy not only provided a safe space for self-reflection, but also enabled the development of strategies to actively change gender-related expectations in one's own life. In the case described, it helped to resolve cognitive dissonance between feminist beliefs and actual behaviour by supporting the person in aligning their own values with their actions.

Ways and methods of self-reflection help people to question their own conditioning and role models, process emotional processes and open up new possibilities for action – in this way, self-reflection works towards a balanced distribution of resources. While personal methods of reflection such as reading or other creative forms of expression enable individuals to engage with traditional gender roles, professional support services offer guided reflection processes and help to break down traditional patterns. These processes can trigger individual and societal change, which in the long term contributes to a more equitable distribution of responsibility and resources between the sexes.

### Transgenerational transmission of fundamental feminist values

The transgenerational transmission of fundamental feminist values can be a relevant factor in gender-equitable working models:

> *"What my aunt and my mother always taught me and my cousin, right from the start, was: you have to be financially independent.* (...) *you have to be independent of a partner so that you can stand on your own two feet if necessary* (...). *That's something that has shaped us a lot. So my cousin and I have always had steady jobs and have always been financially independent. And that's what I keep telling my daughters now."*
>
> (48 JS, female, 55)

The interviewee first describes how her grandmother's financial dependence on her grandfather led to an unhappy marriage. Her own mother and aunt passed on their observation that financial dependence and a traditional division of labour can lead to an unhappy life to the next generation, their daughters.

The transgenerational transmission of fundamental feminist values is a factor that promotes gender equality, as it conveys the message that gender roles are not innate but learned through socialisation. Without this transmission, a traditional division of labour can be passed on to the next generation, as children often unconsciously adopt the role models of their parents. Feminist values also raise awareness of invisible work such as mental load, emotional labour and the organisation of everyday life. Without this awareness, the burden of care work often remains invisible and unrecognised. Passing on these values helps to ensure that care work is not seen as a "female task" but as a shared responsibility. Those who grow up with feminist values are more likely to make career and family decisions free from gender stereotypes and are willing to negotiate the distribution of care tasks in a spirit of partnership. Social change happens over generations. Only if fundamental feminist values are continuously passed on can a culture emerge in which an equal division of labour becomes the norm rather than the exception.

### Personal attitudes & skills: self-efficacy, critical thinking and willingness to develop

At the individual level, personal attitudes and experiences also have a decisive influence. Trust in one's own ability to act is particularly relevant. People who perceive themselves as effective are more willing to question traditional gender roles. One interviewee sums it up: *"I made a conscious decision not to fall into the traditional model. I didn't want to be dependent on my husband, I wanted to go my own way" (16 JS, female, 31).* This feeling of autonomy is complemented by the ability to critically question social expectations. One interviewee describes this as a real liberating effect: *"I freed myself from social expectations. I didn't have to do what others expected of me." (36 VS, male, 39).* Such reflection processes encourage the courage to break new ground – even if it does not correspond to the mainstream. At the same time, resilience, i.e. mental strength, is needed to deal with resistance. One person describes how writing helped them to cope better with difficult situations: *"It helped me to organise my thoughts and deal better with difficult situations" (49 OP, male, 47).* Finally, a willingness to engage in personal development also helps to gain new perspectives and embed gender-equitable behaviour. *"Reading helps me gain new perspectives and see things differently. I often find myself in stories that help me question my own thought patterns" (49 OP, male, 47).*

#### Illness as a "window of opportunity"

Extraordinary life events such as illness can open up new opportunities for action, challenge existing gender roles and trigger new negotiation processes within relationships and family structures. A key element is that illness often requires a radical reorganisation of everyday life. In one of the interviews analysed, it becomes clear that health restrictions can lead to men taking on more care work and women having the opportunity to focus on other aspects of their lives:

> "*Suddenly he had to take care of things he had never done before. I couldn't, so he learned to cook, looked after the children and dealt with the teachers. That showed him what it really means.*"
>
> (43 JS, female, 38)

Such changes can lead to a more equitable division of labour in the long term, as men* gain a new perspective on the importance of care work through direct experience.

In addition, illness can call financial dependence into question. If the main breadwinner falls ill, alternative sources of income must be found, which can lead to women* becoming more integrated into the labour market or men* considering more flexible working hours. This redistribution can break down existing role models and contribute to the economic independence of both partners in the long term.

### 3.4.2 Factors influencing equality at the micro level

#### External, informal care network

A functioning external, informal care network, provided by grandparents, but also by other relatives or close friends, is a significant factor in promoting gender equality. Many of the interviews analysed show that a reliable care network is crucial in enabling women* to enter the labour market earlier and to a greater extent. A particularly relevant aspect is that external family care structures increase parents' flexibility and thus enable a more equitable division of labour within the partnership. One interview shows, for example, that a mother was able to remain active in her career thanks to the support of her own mother, whereas without this support she would have been forced into a traditional housewife role.

Emotional and psychological relief also play an important role. Parents who know that their children are well cared for can concentrate better on their professional activities, which in turn improves their career opportunities. The interviews also show that men* who grow up in an environment with supportive family structures are more willing to actively participate in raising children. This can break down traditional role perceptions, leading to greater gender equality in the long term.

Friends and neighbours can also play an important role as informal carers. In one of the interviews, for example, a neighbour acted as a surrogate grandmother, which enabled the family

to achieve a more equal division of paid work and care work. This shows that not only family ties but also social networks can contribute to promoting gender equality.

However, it should be noted that an external, informal care network does not necessarily lead to greater gender equality in partnerships. One of the interviews examined (see OP 30, female, 50) shows the opposite. External support from the interviewee's mother was helpful in enabling her to balance work and family life in the short term. However, it prevented a profound change in the dynamics of the partnership, as the equal sharing of care work by the partner did not take place, but was compensated for by the child's grandmother. This shows that external care alone does not automatically lead to gender equality if it merely maintains an existing unequal division of labour instead of fundamentally changing it.

Overall, it can be concluded that a functioning informal external care network not only makes it easier to balance family and work, but can also contribute significantly to reducing existing gender inequalities. The possibility of distributing paid work and care work more equitably is also linked to the availability of external, informal care beyond formal, institutional services (such as nurseries, kindergartens, etc.), whether provided by grandparents, other relatives or close social networks. However, external care networks work against gender equality in couple relationships when they compensate for the father's absence from care work and thus perpetuate existing unequal divisions of labour.

### Conscious planning of the division of labour and care work before the birth of the child

The analysis of the interviews shows that consciously planning the division of labour and care work before the birth of a child has a significant influence on sustainable gender equality in family structures. In a few cases, the division of labour and care work was consciously negotiated and planned before the birth of a child. One interviewee described how she and her partner agreed before the birth of their child that both would reduce their working hours to 20 hours per week after shared parental leave in order to share care work fairly. Another interviewee described how, before the birth of their child, the family made a conscious decision that both parents should spend as much time as possible with the child. By combining various financial support measures (e.g. educational leave, parental leave), it was possible for both parents to take a longer period of leave from work and devote themselves fully to childcare. This required careful planning.

However, most interviews show that the division of labour and care work were not explicitly planned before the birth of the child. The lack of negotiation of care work before the birth of a child contributes significantly to an unbalanced distribution of resources, as traditional role patterns can become entrenched as a result. The interviews show that women* often automatically take on the main responsibility for childcare after the birth, partly to avoid unpleasant confrontations.

### Encouraging spaces for negotiation & vulnerability

A brave space in which partners can show their vulnerability to each other and negotiate on an equal footing is an essential factor for gender equality, as it breaks down traditional gender norms and hierarchical structures within relationships. Many of the interviews analysed show that unequal power relations and socially transmitted role models often lead to an asymmetrical distribution of care work and career opportunities. A space in which partners can talk openly about their needs, fears and expectations makes it possible to consciously question these inequalities and find individual solutions for a fairer distribution of responsibility.

A central aspect is mutual recognition of one's own vulnerability. Traditional gender role requirements mean that men* must demonstrate emotional strength and women* must take on emotional responsibility in relationships. A Brave Space (cf. Arao & Clemens 2013) can break this dynamic by allowing men* to openly share emotional insecurities and burdens, while empowering women* to clearly articulate their needs and boundaries. This leads to a culture of negotiation based on partnership that extends far beyond private relationships and can influence social structures.

In addition, such a space enables concrete negotiations about the division of labour, career planning and parenting. In many partnerships, it is the lack of open communication that leads to women* taking on a larger share of unpaid work, while men are less restricted in their career decisions. One respondent described how consciously discussing life goals and the division of labour can enable women* to better realise their professional ambitions: "*We talked a lot about what we both wanted and how we could reconcile that. It wasn't always easy, but we tried to find a solution that worked for both of us*" *(45 JS, female, 41)*.

A Brave Space also promotes the emotional and mental equal distribution of responsibility. Often, the burden of emotional work, i.e. maintaining the relationship, family life and interpersonal harmony, falls on the shoulders of women*. Through a conscious culture of negotiation in which both partners actively participate in this work, a fairer distribution of mental and emotional burdens can be achieved.

### "Care for Relationship"

The interviews show that people who become parents tend to cut back in two areas after the birth of a child: time for themselves and time with their partners. When conversations take place, they usually revolve around the well-being of the child, while emotional closeness, shared interests and the quality of the relationship take a back seat. However, when both partners actively nurture their relationship – i.e. consciously make time for each other, pursue joint projects and maintain mutual fascination – a partnership-based approach to work and life is strengthened, rather than falling back into traditional role patterns. One respondent aptly describes this:

> "*If we hadn't consciously made time for each other on a regular basis, I would have automatically fallen into the role of the one who takes care of everything – simply because it's easier than negotiating every time.*"

(45 JS, female, 41)

This quote illustrates that consciously nurturing the relationship helps to understand care work as a joint project and not as an automatic task for women.

In addition, "care for relationship" promotes emotional equality. In the sense that both partners actively care for their relationship, emotional work is shared equally, which can contribute to a more equitable division of paid work and care work in the long term.

#### Relationship building & everyday practice – supportive, open communication, flexible, respecting boundaries

At the micro level, i.e. in everyday interactions – especially in couple relationships – several factors contribute to equality. Mutual support in challenging phases of life, such as professional stress or family pressures, creates the basis for flexible and fair negotiation processes. One interviewee reports for example:

> "*My wife and my work environment reacted incredibly well when I was mentally exhausted. This support helped me not to fixate on my work, but to consider other areas of my life.*"

(36 VS, male, 39)

Such experiences show how important it is to have a cooperative understanding. At the same time, communication about the division of tasks plays a central role. Conscious and continuous communication about the distribution of paid work and care work prevents responsibility from being automatically assigned to one person: "*We try to divide everything fairly. There are no clear male or female tasks; instead, we decide together who does what.*" *(16 JS, female, 31)* Furthermore, it is evident that flexibility in everyday organisation – for example, by dividing tasks according to the time available – facilitates the equal use of resources: "*My partner and I take turns. Whoever has more time takes on more. There are no fixed responsibilities*" *(18 JS, female, 31).* The decisive factor here is the willingness to question rigid roles and develop viable solutions together. A climate of mutual respect in which personal boundaries are taken seriously, and social expectations are critically reflected upon is also central. This creates space for fairer decision-making processes within the relationship.

### 3.4.3 Factors influencing equality at the meso level

#### Community projects

Community projects are an important factor in gender equality because they strengthen social networks, organise care work collectively and break down structural barriers that often prevent women* from participating equally in working life or society. Many of the interviews analysed show that access to supportive communities and shared responsibility reduces gender inequalities in everyday life.

A key mechanism is the reduction of individual care work. Community projects offer a way to distribute care tasks more equitably through shared care models, neighbourly support or shared resources. This gives women* in particular more time and mental space for paid work, political participation or personal development. One interview illustrates this dynamic particularly well:

> "*Without the neighbourhood network, I would have ended up in the traditional housewife role. But because we support each other, I can work without constantly feeling guilty.*"
>
> (50 OP, female, 61)

This example shows that community projects create alternative social structures in which care work is organised collectively rather than individually.

Such projects also contribute to the renegotiation of gender roles. Active participation in community initiatives in which all genders take on equal responsibility creates new social role models and lived practices of equality.

Another decisive factor is the creation of inclusive spaces for political and social participation. Women are often underrepresented in political decision-making processes. Community projects can offer a low-threshold opportunity for political participation by opening up spaces for women to get involved and network. This promotes gender equality not only at the meso level, but also at the structural level.

### Caring Companies

Caring companies, i.e. companies that cultivate a caring and supportive corporate culture, are a key factor in achieving a balanced distribution of resources, as they break down the structural barriers that prevent men from taking on care work and women from participating equally in working life. Many of the interviews analysed show that access to flexible working models, company childcare and an appreciative corporate culture contribute significantly to reducing gender inequalities.

A key mechanism is the compatibility of paid work and care work. In traditional family structures, women* still take on the majority of unpaid care work, which limits their career opportunities. Caring Companies offer a way to reduce this double burden through flexible working hours, home office models and company support systems. One interview participant describes the importance of such measures: "*Without the flexibility to organise my working hours, I would never have been able to pursue my career in this way. I didn't have to choose between family and career – I could have both*" *(50 OP, female, 61).* Another important aspect is the culture of care and appreciation in caring companies. Such a corporate culture not only promotes gender-equitable personnel structures, but also an atmosphere in which parenthood and care work are recognised as equally important areas of life alongside gainful employment. This reduces the stigma often associated with family-related absences or flexible working models, especially for women*.

Furthermore, caring companies contribute to gender equality in care work by promoting parental leave models for all genders and enabling men to take an active role in care work. In the long term, this can lead to a cultural shift in which care work is no longer seen as primarily a female responsibility, but as a task for society as a whole.

In addition, Caring Companies offer networks, mentoring programmes and career opportunities that actively promote women* in leadership positions and break down structural barriers to career advancement. This strengthens the visibility of women* in decision-making positions in the long term and contributes to changing corporate cultures.

### Raising awareness through education

Educational institutions play a central role in promoting gender equality, as they shape social norms and role models. Raising awareness through education means that both learners and teachers are made aware of gender-equitable structures and equal opportunities. Many of the interviews analysed show that education helps to break down stereotypical patterns of thinking and open up new possibilities for action. An important aspect here is that this awareness can be raised both in the formal education system (school education or university studies) and informally (e.g. through discussions in the social environment):

> "*I studied feminist theories intensively during my studies, but we also discussed equality in conversations with my friends and family. That helped me to see things differently.*"
>
> (25 VS, female, 28)

Another key mechanism of awareness-raising through education is the perception and reflection of cognitive dissonance. When individuals develop a feminist perspective through education but are confronted with contrary practices in their environment or through their own behaviour, an inner conflict arises:

> "*It's important to me to live out my feminist values authentically. When I notice that I or my partner are acting contrary to these values, I feel uncomfortable. Education has shown me that this discomfort is cognitive dissonance – and that I can actively do something about it.*"
>
> (25 VS, female, 28)

Awareness-raising through education is a relevant prerequisite for gender equality, as it enables individuals to recognise existing inequalities, question contradictions and initiate structural change.

In addition, by raising awareness among teachers and multipliers, educational institutions help to ensure that gender-equitable teaching methods, diverse role models and reflective assessment criteria are integrated into everyday education. This promotes a school and university culture in which all genders are encouraged to develop in all subject areas and professional fields.

It should be noted critically that educational institutions only work towards gender equality if they represent the corresponding values and attitudes. Otherwise, they contribute to

traditional values and thus to an unbalanced distribution of resources. One respondent reports that she grew up in an environment where traditional gender roles were not questioned at school, but rather girls were prepared for social or domestic activities, while boys were encouraged to pursue technical and scientific subjects. Another respondent described how, as a girl, she was less encouraged to pursue ambitious educational paths and was instead prepared to support her family later in life, which influenced her career choice in the long term.

Awareness-raising through education is an important factor in gender equality, as it conveys feminist values and gender-equitable perspectives and makes people aware of their own cognitive dissonance. Education is therefore not only an instrument for imparting knowledge, but also a central lever for social transformation towards an equal and reflective way of life.

### Professional counselling services

The interviews revealed a wide range of different counselling services, such as psychosocial counselling, couples and family counselling, career re-entry and career counselling, legal advice for women, mentoring and coaching programmes, therapeutic services and counselling for single parents. Professional counselling often includes reflection on gender roles and power relations. Many people grow up with normative ideas about the tasks and responsibilities that women* and men* should take on in the family, at work and in society. Counselling can help to raise awareness of these patterns and show ways to realise alternative models of living and working. One interviewee describes the importance of such reflection:

> "*In counselling, I understood for the first time why I constantly feel overwhelmed. I realised that I am always the one who takes care of everything – not because it has to be that way, but because that's how I learned to do it. Recognising this has helped me to actively change things.*"
>
> (50 OP, female, 61)

In addition to individual reflection, professional counselling also offers concrete strategies for changing unequal structures. This applies to the fairer distribution of care work and gainful employment as well as dealing with experiences of discrimination or returning to work after a family phase. Especially in crisis situations such as separation, parenthood or career changes, counselling can provide targeted support to promote gender equality processes within partnerships or work contexts.

Another important mechanism is strengthening negotiating skills. Counselling teaches strategies for clearly articulating one's own needs, setting boundaries and advocating for greater equality in partnerships or professional contexts. This is particularly relevant in relationships where women* have traditionally had less freedom of choice or financial independence: "*Through counselling, I have learned to express my concerns clearly without feeling guilty. I used to think I had to do everything on my own – now I actively ask for support*" *(45 JS, female, 41)*. In addition, professional counselling services help to support social change by highlighting structural problems. Counselling centres often work closely with political institutions, employers or educational institutions to develop and implement gender-equitable measures.

#### Networks for gender equality

Networks, organisations and initiatives promote gender equality through targeted support structures. Networks for women* in leadership positions open up new career opportunities and increase the visibility of their expertise. "*I have made many valuable contacts in a women's network that have helped me advance my career. Without this network, it would have been more difficult*" (*33 OP, female, 35).* At the same time, new spaces are also emerging for men who want to become actively involved in care work. Exchange is particularly important for fathers who decide to take parental leave or work part-time: "*It helps enormously to see that other fathers are doing the same thing. You no longer feel like an exception, but part of* a movement" *(21 JS, female, 31).* These experiences not only have an impact on individuals, but can also contribute to the normalisation of alternative role models in the long term.

### 3.4.4 Factors influencing gender equality at the macro level

#### Needs-based, formal childcare

Many of the interviews analysed show that the availability of flexible and comprehensive childcare services is a key factor in balancing work and family life. An essential mechanism is the reduction of structural barriers that often prevent women* from returning to work after giving birth or from arranging their working hours in line with their qualifications and career goals. In the absence of reliable childcare options, the main responsibility for childcare usually remains with women*, which can lead to financial disadvantages, fewer career opportunities and poverty in old age in the long term.

One interview participant described the challenges posed by inadequate childcare:

> "*I was a single mother* (...) *and I raised her on my own. I also worked full-time at the time.* (...) *Back then, part-time nursery places were only available from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m., and part-time work at my company was also only available from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. I couldn't manage that.*"
>
> (48 JS, female, 55)

This shows that childcare services sometimes do not meet the real needs of working parents. In particular, inflexible opening hours or a lack of afternoon and after-school care make it difficult for women* to work full-time or pursue career opportunities.

In addition, needs-based childcare also influences the distribution of care work between parents. When childcare facilities offer flexible models, it becomes easier for fathers to actively participate in childcare. In addition, well-developed childcare helps to challenge social gender roles. If children learn at an early age that both mothers and fathers can work and that childcare facilities are an equal alternative to family care, this can have a long-term impact on social norms.

### No income differences

Differences in income between both parents contribute to promoting a balanced distribution of resources. A key mechanism is bargaining power within the partnership. If both partners have a similar income, it is easier to make equal decisions about parental leave, working time models or care work. In many partnerships with a significant income gap, women* remain trapped in a traditional breadwinner-dependent structure, as the loss of income of the higher-earning partner (usually the father) is seen as economically risky.

Another problem is that low incomes for women* can lead to financial dependence and poverty in old age in the long term:

> *"I only worked part-time for years because it simply made financial sense for my husband to stay in full-time employment. Now I realise that I'm missing out – financially and in terms of career opportunities."*
>
> (50 OP, female, 61)

Unequal income levels contribute to women reducing their paid work in favour of family work, with long-term consequences: lower pension entitlements, few career opportunities and economic insecurity.

On the other hand, no or only small income differences have a positive effect on the social perception of role models, strengthen financial independence, enable a partnership-based division of paid work and care work, and break down stereotypical gender roles. Sustainable equality can only be achieved if women* are as economically secure as men* and their career prospects are not limited by unequal pay or part-time traps.

### Demand on the labour market

Growing demand for labour in an industry can reduce gender inequality by challenging traditional role attributions, facilitating access for underrepresented groups and promoting a more equitable distribution of gainful employment. Some of the interviews analysed show that economic changes, such as a shortage of skilled workers or a growing industry, can lead to women* entering previously male-dominated fields of work or men* switching to care professions.

Breaking down gender segregation in the labour market is important here. In many industries, women* or men* are structurally over- or underrepresented, for example, in technical professions or in the care sector. Increased demand for labour can put pressure on employers to specifically target previously underrepresented groups of applicants, which in the long term will lead to a more gender-balanced distribution across different occupational sectors.

Another example is the increase in salaries and better working conditions in previously low-paid female-dominated industries due to rising demand: *"It was only when the skills shortage hit that better wages were suddenly offered. Before that, they always said there was no budget for it" (50 OP, female, 61).* This development can not only improve the financial situation of women* but also contribute to the recognition of care work as a socially essential activity, which in the long term will change stereotypical perceptions of "typical women's jobs".

At the same time, high demand for labour can also make it easier for previously underrepresented genders to enter the workforce. When companies specifically recruit men for jobs in nursing or education, this not only combats the shortage of skilled workers, but also promotes a more gender-equitable distribution of paid work and care work.

### Retirement as a "window of opportunity "

Men*, particularly those who have been strongly bound to traditional masculinity requirements and thus to the role of breadwinner during their working lives, experience a change in their social role when they retire. The disappearance of the traditional breadwinner role creates space to become more involved in care work and take on tasks that were previously often considered "unmanly." One interview participant describes this development:

> "*My husband only started getting more involved in the household after he retired. It just wasn't part of his self-image before – now he has time and sees everything that needs to be done.*"
>
> (50 OP, female, 61)

As men* take on more responsibility for care work after retirement, rigid role patterns are loosened. This change is also evident among men* who became fathers late in life. Now that they are no longer under the pressure of full-time employment, they can spend more time with their children, devote time to their upbringing and take on an active role. While younger fathers often find it difficult to balance work and family life, retirement allows older fathers to build closer bonds with their children.

The situation is similar to grandfathers, who often play a more relaxed and emotionally accessible role in the family than fathers in their working lives. Grandfathers sometimes find it easier to devote themselves intensively to their grandchildren. One interviewee describes this vividly:

> "*My dad said about himself: Now that he's a grandpa, he would have liked to have had something with us daughters. Exactly. Just more time for each other. He was the great teacher, was around a lot during the holidays and in the summer holidays. That was great, of course.*"
>
> (02 OP, female, 39)

This development shows that grandfathers are no longer in the direct role of provider and therefore have more time and emotional resources to care for their grandchildren. In doing so, they take on tasks that may have been difficult for them in their own fatherhood and contribute to the intergenerational transfer of care work.

### Political legitimacy of diverse family forms & legal regulations for equal parental leave

Social conditions are crucial when it comes to structural equality. Political measures that legally safeguard different family models create the conditions for diversity in life choices. However, there are still obstacles, as one interviewee emphasises: "*There are still many hurdles for alternative family forms, whether in terms of adoption or legal protection*" *(21 JS, female, 31)*. This

makes legal regulations that promote the equal distribution of care work all the more important. A key factor at the macro level is the legal design of parental leave regulations. Current structures often result in women* taking longer periods of parental leave and men returning to work more quickly. Mandatory sharing (use-it-or-lose-it regulations) of parental leave promotes a more equitable distribution of care work. One interviewee described how her partner made a conscious decision to take longer parental leave and how this was made easier by company regulations: "*It was simply important to my partner. Parental leave was very much his wish, and he wanted to do it. And part-time work was also a matter of course for him*" *(33 OP, female, 35)*. Legal adjustments could structurally support such individual decisions and thereby promote equality between mothers and fathers.

### 3.4.5 Excursus: Factors contributing to inequality: What counteracts this?

In addition to the factors promoting gender equality, the GEQ-AT interviews also identified factors that have the opposite effect, i.e., factors promoting gender inequality, which will be presented in a brief digression[19] . Here, too, a distinction is made between the four levels (onto, micro, meso and macro).

[19] Due to time and space constraints in the final report, these factors contributing to gender inequality can only be presented in summary form. However, the authors believe that a more in-depth look at the GEQ-AT material already collected would be worthwhile and represents a potential for follow-up projects.

The following chart provides an overview of the various factors contributing to gender inequality, derived from the qualitative GEQ-AT material collected:

**Table6: Overview table of factors contributing to inequality derived from the GEQ-AT interviews**

| **ONTO**<br>**(individual level)** | **MICRO**<br>**(close social relationships)** |
|---|---|
| – "Man Box" socialisation<br>– Podium masculinity<br>– Distrust of men's caregiving abilities<br>– Motherhood as primary identity marker<br>– Control patterns<br>– Transgenerational relativisation of models of division of labour<br>– Intragenerational relativisation of models of division of labour | – Children<br>– Dependent relationships, unreliability<br>– Geographically distant separation<br>– Transgenerational economic dependence<br>– Reduction to male "helper" role<br>– Reversal of gender stereotypes regarding gainful employment but not with regard to care work |
| **MESO**<br>**(organisations)** | **MACRO**<br>**(social framework conditions)** |
| – Disabling work regulations<br>– Architecture of social control<br>– Non-caring companies | – Inadequate institutional childcare<br>– Compensatory strategies<br>– Complex and confusing welfare state regulations<br>– Gender pay gap & segregation in the labour market |

**Influencing Factors**
**Direction**
**Inequality**

### Factors influencing inequality at the ontological level

The following factors at the ontological level, which contribute to gender inequality within the family, were identified in the interviews conducted as part of GEQ-AT:

– *"Man Box" socialisation:* Socialisation through the "Man Box" forces men* to adhere to narrow, traditional norms of masculinity such as emotional toughness, dominance and independence, thereby suppressing alternative forms of expression and vulnerability. The material contains numerous references to socialisation through the "man box". Several male

interviewees describe how emotional restraint, silence about feelings and functional role divisions were the norm in their families of origin – very much in line with the "man box". Socialisation through the "man box" leads to gender inequality in current relationships because it suppresses emotional communication, devalues men's participation in care work, distributes economic responsibility asymmetrically, prioritises aggression and dominance over cooperation, and makes women primarily responsible for care work. These patterns, internalised in childhood, also shape relationship practices in adulthood – often to the detriment of both genders, but especially at the expense of equality.

- *Podium masculinity:* The term "podium masculinities" describes a form of male care practice that appears progressive and equality-oriented on the surface, but in fact reproduces a form of hegemonic masculinity. These "new fathers" adopt the symbolism and rhetoric of caring masculinities at the attitudinal level, but without seriously living them out in their behaviour ("they can talk the talk, but don't walk the walk"). In this way, they hope to shed the stigma of hegemonic masculinity and reap the rewards of caring masculinity (being seen as a "good guy"). The consequence of this is that paid work continues to have the highest priority and family care remains secondary, thus contributing to gender inequality. One interviewee (see 30 OP, female, 50) reports, for example, that although her partner was officially on two months' paternity leave, he used this as personal time off to recover from his demanding job, while she, the mother, continued to take care of the children by using up her remaining holiday entitlement and also staying at home. These men* can be described as performing "podium masculinity" because they boast about their supposed achievement (in this case, two months of "bogus" parental leave) and present it as an outstanding achievement.

- *Mistrust of men's* care skills:* Mistrust of fathers' care skills reinforces gender inequality because it reinforces the idea that care is primarily associated with women and not with men. An example of this can be found in an interview with a father who is part of a rainbow family consisting of two gay mothers and two gay fathers. Despite his commitment, he indirectly experiences the continuation of traditional gender patterns, as he and his partner are denied caring abilities by the mothers to a certain extent. This mistrust means that fathers are often not even considered as equal caregivers, systematically pushing women* into primary responsibility and preventing genuine division of labour.

- *Motherhood as a primary identity marker:* When mothers identify strongly with their role as mothers, this can contribute to gender inequality because it reinforces traditional gender role attributions and makes alternative lifestyles for women* more difficult or devalues them. The strong focus on motherhood as the central or even sole source of female identity promotes an unequal division of care work, as it tends to exclude fathers from care work or perceive them as less or insufficiently competent for care work. In an interview, one interviewee describes how his mother devoted herself entirely to the family, had hardly any social contacts and gave up her professional career permanently in favour of motherhood

because: "*My mother had this idea that as a mother you don't have any friends and you don't meet anyone else, but your only job [*is] *to look after the family*" *(49 OP, male, 47).*

- *Control pattern:* In one interview, the interviewee describes the need *to "not let go of the reins."* According to the interviewee, this results in having to do everything herself. This control pattern leads to gender inequality, on the one hand because it demands a lot from the controlling person, as control ties up a significant amount of energy and time resources, and on the other hand because equality can only work if there is trust in the care abilities of the partner (see also "Distrust of men's care abilities" above).

- *Transgenerational relativisation of division of labour models:* One factor contributing to gender inequality is the transgenerational relativisation of division of labour models. Some of the interviewees compare their own division of labour model with the one they observed in their parents' relationship. If you live in a dual-income model in your current family situation but grew up in a breadwinner model in your family of origin, your current living situation appears more progressive in relation to your parents' living situation. Nevertheless, this is not an egalitarian, equal division of labour model. It becomes a factor contributing to gender inequality when it is perceived as sufficiently progressive.

- *Intragenerational relativisation of models of division of labour:* In addition to the transgenerational relativisation of models of division of labour, the interviews also reveal intragenerational relativisations of models of division of labour. One interviewee said, for example:

  > *"I would say that my parents' division of roles was quite traditional. Housework and children were my mother's responsibility* (...). [Authors' note: With regard to household income, she continues:] *My father really verbalised this and said that the money I earn is not mine, but that I earn it for the family* (...). *In my husband's family, it was completely different. My father-in-law actually managed the money, and my mother-in-law had to ask him for household money and also had to prove what she was spending it on."*
  >
  > (30 OP, female, 50 years old)

  This passage illustrates that although the woman's family of origin had a traditional division of roles, there was a more equal view of income as a shared resource. In the partner's family of origin, the model was more restrictive, with financial control exercised by the father. Here, too, if the more progressive division of labour model is perceived as sufficiently progressive, the intragenerational relativisation of division of labour models becomes a factor contributing to gender inequality.

### Factors contributing to inequality at the micro level

The following factors at the micro level that contribute to gender inequality within the family could be derived from the material:

- *Children:* The birth of a child can lead to inequality in relationships. It has been shown that couples who previously had egalitarian relationships often fall back into traditional role patterns after the birth of a child, simply because their environment and society push them into these "expected" roles and because, in a new phase of life with many new challenges, this seems to be the easiest way to cope. For example, one interviewee described her parents' relationship, saying that despite their desire for equality in their partnership, traditional role models from their family environment became effective again after the birth of their children, as these were deeply rooted in society and seemed easier to follow than egalitarian patterns during stressful phases of life.

- *Dependent relationships, unreliability:* Financial dependencies in couple relationships lead to gender inequality because they reinforce power asymmetries and limit the economically dependent person – usually the woman – in their autonomy and negotiating position in everyday and structural decisions.
  If one partner does not adhere to jointly agreed arrangements, this inevitably leads to gender inequality. Unfulfilled agreements, e.g. regarding childcare, must inevitably be compensated for by another person (often the other partner).

- *Geographical separation:* If geographical circumstances do not allow for the sharing of care responsibilities, e.g. because the places of residence of those affected are too far apart, this can become a factor contributing to gender inequality.

- *Transgenerational economic dependence:* If, for example, a family lives in the grandfather's house, this can lead to economic dependence on the grandfather, and this dependence can in turn be used as a means of pressure to live according to traditional ideas of family (in this case, those of the grandfather). This can also be a factor contributing to gender inequality.

- *Reversal of gender stereotypes with regard to paid work but not with regard to care work:* What becomes apparent in some interviews is the one-sided reversal of gender stereotypes in the area of paid work, while the "traditional" distribution of care work remains unchanged. One interviewee describes how she does more paid work than her partner, earns more and occasionally lends him money. When it comes to care work, however, she says:

  > "*The mental workload is clearly on me. I think about things that need to be done. It's not a problem to say, 'Please do that' or 'Make sure that happens'. But remembering that it needs to be done is my responsibility.*"
  >
  > (51 OP, female, 46)

  However, the interview also states: "*So if I take care of everything, then* (...) *I have the final say*" *(ibid.)*. Reversed gender roles with regard to gainful employment, while stereotypical gender roles with regard to care work remain unchanged, lead, at least in this example, to an unbalanced division of labour with unilateral rather than shared decision-making power. An almost identical pattern can also be found in another interview. Here, too, the interviewee describes how she has a much higher income than her partner. Here, too, care work

and, above all, the mental load fall predominantly on the interviewee, even if her partner "helps" (as described in interview 51 OP).

– *Reduction to the male "helper" role:* Reducing fathers to a "helper" role in the family – i.e. as a supporting figure to the mother rather than an equal, autonomous caregiver – creates and stabilises an asymmetrical power and work relationship in families that not only reflects gender inequality but also actively (re)produces it. It prevents care work from being understood and practised as a shared, equal parental responsibility.

### Factors at the meso level contributing to inequality

The following factors at the meso level that contribute to gender inequality could be derived from the material:

– *Obstructive work regulations:* Working conditions such as shift work, long working hours or a lack of predictability often contribute to gender inequality. A striking example is provided by the account of one interviewee who describes how she suffered from her father's excessive workload: "*There was no other option because my father was really swamped with work and often had to work at the weekend*" (*20 VS, female, 39 years old)*. In such situations, unpaid care work usually falls to the mother, which in the long term means financial dependence and fewer career opportunities for women. Overall, several accounts from the interviews illustrate that unfavourable working conditions – such as shift work, a lack of family-friendly working time models or inflexible working hours – make it extremely difficult to share paid work and care work equally between partners and reinforce gender inequality in both the private and professional spheres.

– *Architecture of social control:* Architecture can also lead to gender inequality if it promotes social control with regard to traditional gender roles. As briefly described above under "Transgenerational economic dependence", one interviewee describes how he grew up in a multi-generational household with his grandfather, who was stuck in traditional gender roles. Since you always had to pass by his flat on the ground floor when leaving or entering the house, he was able to exercise social control and determine what was appropriate and what was not. This is an example of how architecture can function as social control and thus lead to gender inequality.

– *Non-caring companies:* Non-caring companies reinforce gender inequality because they structurally disadvantage mothers in particular by failing to take care obligations into account, thereby cementing traditional gender roles. One interviewee reported that as a single parent working in a public institution, she constantly had to adjust her working hours because no consideration was given to her childcare responsibilities, while another interviewee described how she had no prospects of promotion in her company after taking maternity leave because part-time work and family orientation were not an option there.

### Factors at the macro level contributing to inequality

The following factors at the macro level that contribute to gender inequality were identified in the collected material:

- *Inadequate institutional childcare:* Inadequate or non-existent institutional childcare contributes to gender inequality because it usually forces mothers to reduce or even give up paid work. One interviewee reported that she often has to leave work early due to a lack of afternoon childcare, which limits her career prospects. Another interviewee described how her mother had to stay at home when she was growing up because there was no full-time childcare available.

- *Compensatory strategies:* As paradoxical as it may sound at first, welfare state strategies for gender equality can sometimes have the opposite effect. For example, pension splitting – a model in which one partner transfers part of their pension contributions to the other partner in order to compensate for disadvantages arising from care work – can lead to care work remaining associated with women and thus reproduce gender stereotypes. For one of the people interviewed, this welfare state measure contributes to the reproduction of traditional role patterns by implicitly assuming that women take on care work and men "give something up" in return.

- *Complex and confusing welfare state regulations:* Welfare state regulations, such as parental leave, can contribute to gender inequality if they are primarily or exclusively taken up by mothers, thereby reinforcing traditional role models. The parental leave system in Austria appears to foster misconceptions due to its complexity and ambiguities. For instance, one interviewee believed her partner was limited to a maximum of two months of income-dependent parental leave, as the widely used designation "12 plus 2" promotes misinterpretations.

- *Gender pay gap & segregation in the labour market:* The gender pay gap and gender-segregated pay – i.e. the difference in pay in typically male or female-dominated industries – contribute to gender inequality because women* earn less, have less financial independence and are more likely to become economically dependent, which in turn restricts their freedom of action and perpetuates traditional role patterns. One interviewee reported that despite having a qualified job in the public sector, she is dependent on her father's money to support her family (cf. 20 VS, female, 39), and another interviewee describes how her husband works in a better-paid industry and she therefore works part-time – even though they had originally aimed for an equal division of labour (cf. 56 VS, female, 30 years old).

## 3.5. Violence and non-violence in the family and in partnerships

The World Health Organisation defines violence as follows:

> *"The intentional use of threatened or actual physical force or physical power against oneself or another person, against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation."*

(WHO 2003, p. 6)

This definition includes various forms of violence (from intimidation and neglect to physical violence) and constellations of violence (from larger groups such as states and interpersonal violence to violence against oneself) as well as different manifestations of violence, some of which are obvious and some of which are difficult to recognise, and which have different consequences (cf. ibid.).

This chapter defines and differentiates between key forms of violence, including physical, psychological, sexual, social and material violence. This is followed by a look at specific constellations of violence, such as violence in the immediate social environment, in families, partnerships and against children, as well as gender-based violence against women, men and LGBTQIA+ people, each backed up by current data from Austria. The results of the GEQ-AT study on current experiences of violence are then presented. In addition, the conditions for violence and non-violence in the current life situation are examined using a multi-level analytical framework model that takes into account influencing factors at four different levels. This is followed by an analysis of experiences of violence in childhood and the conditions for violence (and non-violence) in the family of origin.

### Forms of violence

Violence takes many different forms. In addition to the three most well-known forms of violence – physical, psychological and sexual – this study also distinguishes between social violence and material violence. These forms of violence can occur in analogue, digital and hybrid spaces. Some of these forms of violence are visible, while others are invisible. Furthermore, the boundaries between different forms of violence are not always clear. Furthermore, the consequences of a form of violence experienced do not necessarily correspond to the type of violence itself – physical violence can also have psychological, economic or social effects, while psychological violence can result in a wide range of complaints. Violence is used to intimidate, dominate, injure or kill others – always with the aim of demonstrating, restoring or maintaining power (cf. Bavarian State Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Affairs, n.d.).

#### Physical violence

Physical violence refers to any form of outwardly directed harm and/or injury to a person. This includes all types of abuse such as *"pinching, kicking, holding down, slapping, hitting, striking with an object, scalding and burning, cutting and shooting injuries, and bruising" (Gewaltinfo*

*2025a)*. In the context of this study, this form of violence includes all types of physical assault (e.g. slapping) and physical violence resulting in injury.

### Psychological violence

Psychological or emotional violence refers to any form of verbal, non-verbal and/or emotional abuse. Compared to physical violence, psychological violence is usually more difficult to recognise, but no less serious in terms of the effects and consequences it leaves on those affected. In the context of this study, this form of violence includes insults, verbal abuse, humiliation, (emotional) blackmail and spying. Psychological violence against children often takes different forms than between adults: It manifests itself primarily through rejection and withdrawal of love, abuse to satisfy narcissistic needs, e.g. of the legal guardians, instilling feelings of guilt, neglect and bullying, e.g. by peers (cf. Federal Ministry for Social Security and Generations 2001).

### Sexualised violence

Sexualised violence refers to any form of violence (physical or psychological) that imposes or forces a sexual act on the victim. This form of violence includes

> "*Sexually harassing comments and looks, exhibitionist acts, intentional touching, even over clothing, verbal sexual harassment, showing pornography, sexual acts against one's will, completed or attempted forced penetration (oral, anal, vaginal).*"
>
> (Gewaltinfo 2025a)

In this study, this form of violence was defined as "*imposing sexual acts*". Sexualised violence against children "*refers to the sexually motivated exploitation of the power imbalance and relationship of dependency between an adult or older youth and a child or young person*" (*Menzel-Holzwarth 2016, p. 9)*.

### Social violence

Social violence refers to actions that aim to deliberately restrict the social life of those affected in order to isolate them and create or reinforce dependencies. This includes, for example, preventing or controlling contact with family, friends or acquaintances, monitoring telephone calls, chats or personal items such as smartphones, and spreading lies about close persons in order to stir up mistrust and destroy relationships. Other forms of social violence include prohibiting or preventing someone from working, refusing to care for children, and locking up those affected (see Frauen helfen Frauen, n.d.; Gewaltinfo 2025). Social violence often occurs in social, partnership or care-related contexts, especially towards children, older people or persons in need of care who are in a special relationship of dependency (cf. e.Medpedia n.d.). This study focuses on the aspect of social violence, which includes restricting contact with relatives and friends and controlling personal belongings (e.g. smartphones) without consent.

### Material violence

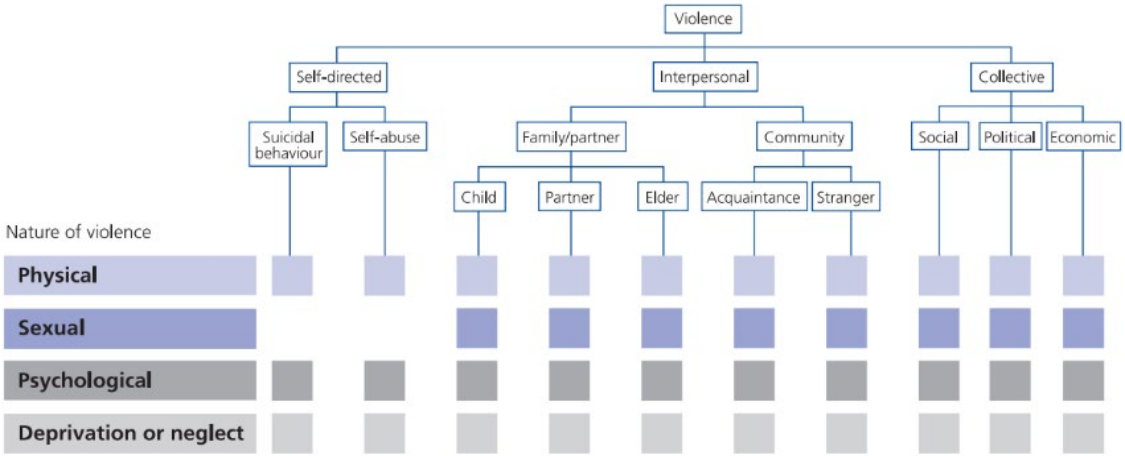
Material or financial or economic violence is defined as "*the unequal distribution of financial resources and the exploitation of economic superiority*" *(City of Vienna, n.d.*). Women, older people and people with disabilities are often affected. Material violence takes various forms, such as creating and/or maintaining financial dependence ( ); providing insufficient financial resources for maintenance, household expenses or one's own care or that of other family members; preventing, stealing or withdrawing education and/or income; keeping financial resources secret; exploiting labour; prohibiting the management or creation of one's own bank account; stealing, withholding or unjustifiably managing another person's property (cf. City of Vienna, n.d.; Gewaltinfo 2025a). In the present study, this form of violence was defined as control of financial expenditure (e.g. by making only limited amounts of money available) and the destruction of personal belongings.

All forms of violence mentioned are subject to clear legal protection provisions in Austria. The most important legal bases are the Criminal Code (StGB), the General Civil Code (ABGB) and specific protective laws such as the Protection Against Violence Act. These regulations define what behaviour is considered violent and offer victims legal options for protection and punishment of violence. At the same time, the understanding of violence is subject to social norms and historical changes. Which actions are recognised as violence and legally regulated is the result of social negotiation and definition processes.

## Constellations of violence

Violence not only manifests itself in different forms, but also occurs in different situations, places, times and constellations of perpetrators and victims.

**Figure25: Typology of violence according to WHO 2003**




Source: WHO 2003.

The World Health Organisation distinguishes between (a) violence against oneself, (b) interpersonal violence and (c) collective violence. Interpersonal violence can be further differentiated between (b1) violence within the family and between intimate partners and (b2) violence

perpetrated by members of the community. The first subgroup is characterised by violence being limited to family members and intimate partners. In contrast, violence in the second subgroup refers to people who are not related and do not necessarily know each other (cf. WHO 2003). This distinction between interpersonal violence by partners and family members in the immediate social environment and interpersonal violence by acquaintances or strangers in public spaces is important because men and women are affected differently (cf. Scambor & Scambor 2017).

### Violence in the immediate social environment

The GEQ-AT study places a particular focus on violence perpetrated by another person or a small group of people or household members – interpersonal violence in the immediate social environment.

The terms "violence in close social relationships", "domestic violence", and "intimate partner violence" are often used synonymously. However, the terms usually draw different boundaries in terms of the constellation of persons and/or geographical circumstances. The term "family" is defined by either common and/or adopted children, blood relationship, or a common place of residence. The term "family", which is historically enriched and loaded with different expectations, describes a form of organisation that is dependent on social components. These change over time, across geographical boundaries and cultural areas, which is why a definition that does not exclude any family forms is virtually impossible. In addition, the term "domestic violence" suggests that it is an intra-family problem, whereby the actual central characteristics of gender roles and power asymmetries are pushed into the background (cf. Brandstetter 2009). The understanding of domestic violence is very similar to the understanding of violence in the family. The term "violence within the family" focuses on the relationship between the persons involved, while the term "domestic violence" focuses on the former or current shared place of residence. This includes not only family members and current partners, but also persons who do not necessarily have an intimate relationship with each other but, for example, share a place of residence or are no longer in an intimate relationship with each other. The term "couple violence" is often used as a synonym for domestic violence, or couple violence is understood as a subcategory, a type of domestic violence. Couple violence describes any form of violence that takes place between current or former intimate relationships, couple relationships. Compared to the types of violence already mentioned, the term "social proximity" is even broader and includes people who are in various types of relationships with each other (romantic, non-traditional relationships, caregivers, etc.). The term "social proximity" focuses on a local boundary (geographical environment, frequency of contact, etc.) and includes not only the place of residence or private space, but also other social environments (e.g. workplace, neighbourhood).

Violence in the social environment is a specific form of interpersonal violence characterised primarily by intimacy and closeness between the perpetrator and the victim. In Austria in 2024, approximately 60% of violent crimes involved a relationship between the perpetrator and the victim (see Federal Ministry of the Interior 2025). Women* are particularly affected by violence

in close social relationships: while men* primarily experience violence in public spaces, women* predominantly experience physical assault in their relationship (29.1%) or within the family (25.2%) (cf. Kapella et al. 2011). Psychological violence is the most commonly reported form of violence in intimate relationships, with 44.5% of women and 28.1% of men reporting that they have experienced psychological abuse in their relationship (cf. Kapella et al. 2011).

Despite a slight decline in reported cases of violence in the private sphere in 2024 by 2.5% compared to the previous year, the long-term trend since 2018 shows a significant increase: The number of cases rose from 15,077 in 2018 to 20,080 in 2024 (see Federal Ministry of the Interior 2025). These figures illustrate the high relevance and persistence of violence in close social circles, especially in close social relationships.[20]

### Violence against children

"*Child abuse* (...) *includes physical, sexual and psychological maltreatment and neglect*" *(WHO 2003, p. 621)*. The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees children fundamental rights, including protection from violence, the right to education, participation and health. In Austria, key children's rights were incorporated into the constitution in 2011, including a legal ban on violence in education (cf. Filler 2019).

Despite this legal framework, violence in childhood remains a widespread phenomenon: according to the Austrian prevalence study by Kapella et al. (2011), around three-quarters of respondents experienced psychological and/or physical violence as children, with hardly any differences between men and women. It is particularly alarming that one in four women and one in eight men experienced sexual violence in childhood (cf. Kapella et al. 2011).

The frequency of violence also depends on age: older respondents report experiences of violence more frequently, which points to a social change that increasingly rejects corporal punishment (cf. Kapella et al. 2011). Nevertheless, school and the family remain the two most common places where violence is experienced in childhood. Children experience psychological and physical violence primarily within the family, while violence at school – especially psychological violence – is mainly perpetrated by classmates. The perpetrators vary according to gender: women* report violence by mothers more frequently, men* by male classmates. Sexual violence is predominantly perpetrated by male perpetrators, often by unknown persons (cf. Kapella et al. 2011). Official crime statistics show that many violent crimes against children are reported: in 2016, 6,914 victims under the age of 18 were registered in Austria as victims of criminal offences against life and limb, 4,714 as victims of criminal offences against freedom and 2,176 as victims of criminal offences against sexual integrity and self-determination. However, the actual number of children affected is likely to be much higher, as it is assumed that there are a significant number of unreported cases (see Federal Ministry of the Interior 2022).

[20] The appendix contains a detailed description and secondary analysis of the four types of violence: violence in the family, domestic violence, intimate partner violence and violence in the immediate social environment.

A digression into the topic of non-violent parenting shows that despite the legal ban on violence in parenting since 1989 and increasing social rejection of physical violence, there is still an ambivalent understanding of the issue. More than half of the population (approx. 56%) see non-violent parenting as ideal, but around a fifth approve of light physical punishment and just as many consider more drastic measures to be necessary in some cases (cf. Gallup Institute 2020). [21]

### Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence is:

> "(...) *any violation of the physical or psychological integrity of a person that is related to the gender of the victim and the perpetrator and is inflicted by the structurally stronger person through the exploitation of a power relationship.*"
>
> (Hagemann-White 2008, p. 8)

Gender-based violence can be directed against all genders, with women* and girls*, regardless of their age and origin, being the group most frequently affected by gender-based violence. This form of violence is based on gender inequality deeply rooted in society and the associated power differences (cf. EIGE n.d.).

This chapter focuses on gender-based violence against women*, violence against men* and violence against LGBTIQA+ persons. A detailed secondary analysis of the underlying studies and data can be found in the appendix.

Violence against women* encompasses all forms of violence that disproportionately affect women* or that they experience because of their (assigned) gender. The Istanbul Convention[22] defines this violence as structurally conditioned and as an expression of a socially entrenched power imbalance between men* and women*. Prevalence data and crime statistics illustrate the dimensions of this violence: in Austria, 34.5% of women* aged 18 to 74 have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. High prevalence rates of physical violence are found both within and outside intimate partnerships; approximately one in four women* has been affected since the age of 15. In addition, 24% of women* surveyed reported sexual violence, and one in five women* has been a victim of stalking. Murder statistics paint a striking picture: since 2015, Austria has seen a consistently higher proportion of female murder victims compared to men*, a pattern that stands out in European comparison. Although a slight decline was observed in 2024, women* remain disproportionately affected by lethal violence.

Men* also experience gender-based violence, although this is often less visible. Violence against men* mainly takes place outside the home, often perpetrated by other men*, and is often trivialised or not recognised as violence. Violence against men* is closely linked to norms of masculinity and the reproduction of hegemonic ideas of masculinity, which also contributes

[21] The appendix contains a detailed description and secondary analysis of violence against children in Austria, supplemented by a digression on the status quo of (non-)violent education.
[22] https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/about-the-convention

to underreporting. While men* experience physical violence more frequently (61.4% compared to 56.8% of women*), they are less likely to be affected by sexualised violence: only 8% of men* reported having experienced intimate touching against their will, compared to 25.7% of women*. The prevalence of psychological violence is high among men* and women*, but women* report more frequently situations that were experienced as threatening. Particular attention is paid to the lack of data: Austria does not yet have a comprehensive national survey on violence against men*, which makes it considerably more difficult to recognise and acknowledge this form of violence. However, the available data, such as police crime statistics, indicate that this is a relevant issue, particularly in the area of violence against life and limb. (Cf. Kapella et al. 2011)

LGBTIQA+ people are another vulnerable group that is specifically affected by violence because of their gender, gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation. In a society characterised by a binary and heteronormative gender order, violence against LGBTIQA+ people is understood as an expression of prejudice and structural discrimination. Around 5% of all LGBTIQA+ people in Austria are victims of physical assault every year – the risk is ten times higher than in the general population (cf. Hart, 2015). Young men between the ages of 18 and 35 are particularly at risk, often in urban areas. According to the FRA study (2020), 11% of respondents have experienced physical or sexual violence in the last five years. The number of unreported cases remains high, as only about 3% of those affected report the incidents to the police. In addition, the lack of data and the often invisible extent of this violence highlight the urgency of further research and measures.

### Forms of violence and patterns of violence in current (and earlier) life situations

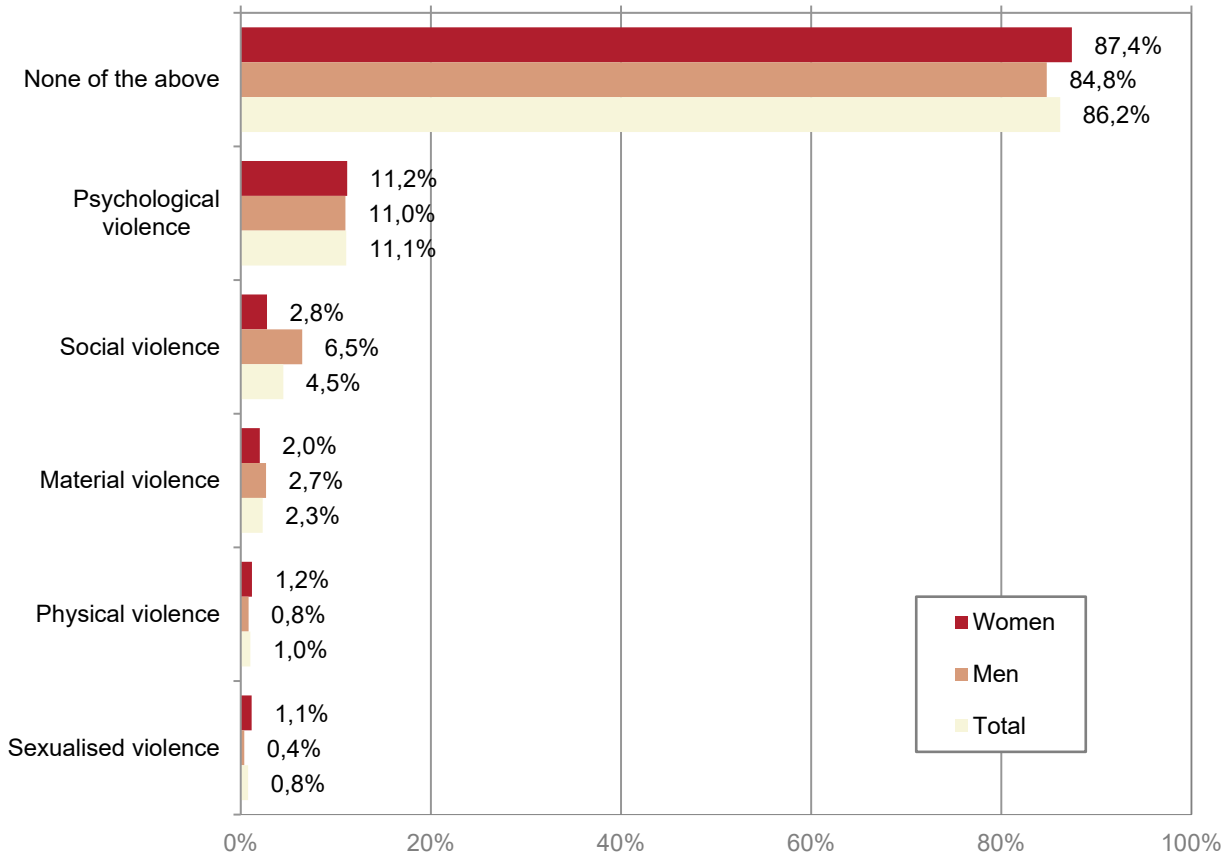
The majority of respondents did not experience violence in their current or previous relationship in the last 12 months: this was reported by 87% of female and 85% of male respondents. The most common form of violence is psychological, affecting 11% of respondents. This includes insults, verbal abuse and humiliation, as well as (emotional) blackmail and spying.

Gender differences only arise in the case of social violence, which includes restrictions on contact with relatives or friends and control over personal belongings (e.g. smartphones). This affects 3% of female respondents and 6% of male respondents in their relationships.

Material violence, i.e. control of financial expenditure (e.g. by providing limited amounts of money) or destruction of property, physical violence (specifically physical assault and physical violence resulting in injury) and sexualised violence (forcing sexual acts) were comparatively rare, each occurring in less than 3% of cases.

No significant group differences in the incidence of violence were found along other sociodemographic characteristics (such as age, education, place of residence).

**Figure26: Experiences of violence in partnerships in the last 12 months (multiple answers possible), by gender**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=2,206, n miss=41, weighted sample.

Around half of respondents did not react to violent experiences in their partnership, and only 14% sought support. The family, acquaintances or friends were the main sources of support, but doctors and hospital care also played an important role. Less use was made of telephone counselling and support services, women's shelters and the police.

What is the situation now for the respondents as perpetrators? 7% of women and 8% of men say they have used violence in their relationship in the last 12 months. There are therefore no significant differences between the sexes. This also applies to other socio-demographic characteristics such as age, place of residence and level of education.

Similar to experiences of violence in partnerships, perpetrators often do not respond to violence committed by their partners – 46% of respondents stated this. Only in 9% of cases did the partner seek professional help or support.

The interviews suggest that one reason for the low uptake of professional support is the difficulty respondents have in talking about violence. Experiences of violence in childhood were discussed relatively openly, while current experiences of violence were talked about much more cautiously. Self-inflicted violence was reported particularly rarely, both in relation to childhood and to the current life situation. This finding can be attributed to three possible factors:

(1) On the one hand, it could indicate a positive social development in which violence in the family context is declining.

(2) On the other hand, it cannot be ruled out that current experiences of violence are less likely to be disclosed due to individual and social barriers. It became apparent that respondents found it easier to talk about past violence than about current violence, as they paused more frequently or had to be asked several times before they were willing to talk about current violence. In addition, experiences were described but not identified as violence. This is evident in the following interview excerpt. When asked, "To what extent was violence an issue in your family context?", the respondent replied:

> *"Well, in my childhood, it was quite common to talk like that. Yes, spanking, beating, smacking the bottom or slapping the ears, that was normal in those days."*
>
> (26 JS, male, 49)

When attention is later turned to current conflicts within the family, a hesitant reaction emerges: "*That's not a pleasant topic, but I understand* [why you're asking]. *There's no voluntary aspect* [to violence]" *(26 JS, male, 49).* As the conversation continues, the interviewee first reflects on his own ideals of cohabitation and related experiences, and only gradually mentions transgressions: "*There is no hitting or assault. In that sense. Not in the traditional way I described, with hitting and slapping. But with holding down*" *(ibid.).* What is striking here is the increasing uncertainty in the language and the reflection that the topic is associated with shame:

> *"With this physical component, I'm already entering an area that could perhaps be described as violence, and that's not nice. It's difficult for the child, or it's not nice ' . And* [about myself] *I feel ashamed* (...) *that when you admit this to yourself, you realise that you are familiar with this cycle of violence. That's interesting. Mhm hm."*
>
> (26 JS, male, 49)

Social shame, fear of negative consequences or the desire for social recognition play a decisive role in the disclosure of experiences of violence. In the course of this, it becomes apparent to what extent the topic of violence is considered taboo in today's society and restricts discussion.

(3) In particular, discussing one's own use of violence seems to be associated with additional barriers – perpetration is rarely addressed. Reasons for this could lie in fear of social condemnation, feelings of shame and the desire to maintain a positive self-image.

Building on this, it becomes apparent that many respondents found it difficult to explicitly name violence as such. In several interviews, experiences of violence were described, yet when asked directly, the respondents often denied that these were acts of violence. The following example illustrates the extent to which a common parenting method that can clearly be classified as violence is not perceived as violence by those affected:

> *Interviewer: You mentioned a slap on the bottom earlier. Were there any other punishments? Was violence an issue?*

*Respondent: No, no, no. I can't remember many situations where I was spanked. I know that was a common parenting method back then, but violence was not an issue, neither towards us nor towards others or anything like that.*"

(56 VS, female, 30 years old)

Here it becomes clear that physical punishment is not classified as violence, but as a socially accepted method of discipline.

The interviews and quantitative data collection revealed that different forms of violence are experienced simultaneously or consecutively. While this was discussed more frequently in the qualitative interviews, only 4% of respondents in the quantitative survey reported experiencing more than one form of violence simultaneously or consecutively. One possible reason for this difference lies in the methodology: while qualitative interviews allow for narrative descriptions, quantitative surveys require a subjective classification as violence, which could lead to underestimation.[23] The combination of forms of violence is made clear in the following interview, among others, in which the respondent reports regular mutual incitement, arguments and lack of support, as well as physical violence in her current relationship:

"*We always provoked each other a lot* (...) *And we always blamed each other during those three and a half years: 'Yes, it's your fault that your child is like this , and that your dad isn't there, and that you don't see your little girl, and so on and so forth. (...*) *And then he started pushing me here and there. Until it got to the point where he hit me on the head and I briefly collapsed (...*)."

(62 VS, female, 24)

This combination of forms of violence within a couple's relationship is also evident in the following interview. The interviewee described the psychological violence through her ex-partner's accusations: "*He blamed me for everything. What? What he was dissatisfied with in his own life*" *(15 VS, female, 55). She* also describes violent dynamics in conflicts that lasted for several days and flared up again and again:

"*Slamming doors. Running away, coming back. Coming back, shouting.* (...) *We sometimes managed to drag out an argument like this for three days, with breaks and then letting it flare up again and again.*"

(15 VS, female, 55)

At the same time, she reports physical violence, such as being grabbed by the upper arm. This demonstrates that emotional and physical violence are closely intertwined: "(...) *that he can get*

[23] In the qualitative interviews, the respondents reported on their experiences without necessarily describing them as violence themselves. This enabled the research team to identify and classify implicit acts of violence. In the quantitative survey, on the other hand, the respondents themselves assessed whether certain experiences were perceived as violence. This different approach could explain why multiple experiences of violence were reported more frequently in the qualitative part.

*so worked up and then he screams too. But he doesn't hit me, because hitting is violence. But grabbing someone by the upper arm? Hm, not violence" (15 VS, female, 55 years old).*

These examples illustrate that violence is often not experienced as a one-dimensional experience. Rather, it takes various forms – verbal, psychological, physical, material, sexualised – and often has a particularly stressful effect when combined.

## Trivialisation, normalisation and legitimisation of violence

Since the people surveyed found it difficult to name violence, they often used strategies of trivialisation, normalisation and legitimisation when reporting experiences of violence. Violence was downplayed, relativised by temporal contexts, legitimised as an appropriate educational measure or embedded in a narrative that emphasised other positive aspects of the life situation.

One strategy for trivialising violence is to relativise it by placing it in a temporal context. One interviewee recounted:

> *"Well, it was a different time, I think.* (...) *There were a few slaps here and there. But real violence? I don't think so. It was a different time. It wasn't really a big deal back then."*
>
> (26 JS, male, 49)

This statement shows that violence is perceived differently depending on the context and was often considered acceptable in the past. People's own experiences of violence are relativised by presenting them as a supposedly "mild form of violence" and placing them in a fundamentally more violent overall context.

Another pattern is the trivialisation of threatened violence, which is not considered violence. One respondent describes a situation in their childhood in which violence was threatened and carried out. They attempt to negate the violent aspect of the act with the following explanation:

> *"And Mummy often threatened to use the fly swatter or got angry or shouted or something. But with her, it was more funny. You knew it wasn't real. It was harmless. So she would chase me with the fly swatter or throw it at me, and it was more relaxed."*
>
> (24 JS, female, 56)

Another form of non-recognition of violence was to acknowledge certain acts of violence as problematic while denying the violent aspect of other acts and situations. Violence is acknowledged, but at the same time embedded in a narrative of "beauty", which relativizes it and weakens its overall assessment of the life situation. One interviewee describes their childhood experiences as follows:

> *"We lived with the child's father for two years when he was very young. Those were the only two years when, at the beginning, I would say it was nice for us because we really had a daily routine there. (...) Although there was a lot of domestic violence towards us children, and towards my mum and so on, and alcohol was involved, from my dad, from*

*the little one. Exactly. But for me, I perceived it as the only two years where I would say we actually had everything you need as a child.*"

(62 VS, female, 24)

Another example shows that violence is perceived as justified when it is understood as an appropriate sanction. One interviewee remembered: "*Once I was really cheeky.* (...) *But [*then] *I got a slap* (...) *Well. But I deserved it.*" *(42 OP, female, 26)* This statement shows that violence is not only legitimised but also presented as a necessary and justified consequence, thereby justifying the action and removing any problem from it.

The tendency not to name violence as such is also evident in the fact that primarily interpersonal violence is referred to as violence. In contrast, intrapersonal and structural violence remain largely invisible in the perceptions of the interviewees and are rarely explicitly categorised as violence. This is also reflected in the content analysis of the interviews: while interpersonal violence was discussed and coded relatively frequently, there were significantly fewer explicit references to structural or intrapersonal violence. This applies both to reports of violence in childhood and to descriptions of current experiences of violence.

## Conditions of violence and non-violence in the current partnership

In the following chapter, the conditions for violence and non-violence are presented using a multi-level framework model that combines the conceptual framework of Hagemann-White et al. (2010) and the condition matrix of Strauss and Corbin (1990). Each condition was assigned to one of the four levels onto, micro, meso and macro with the following specifications.

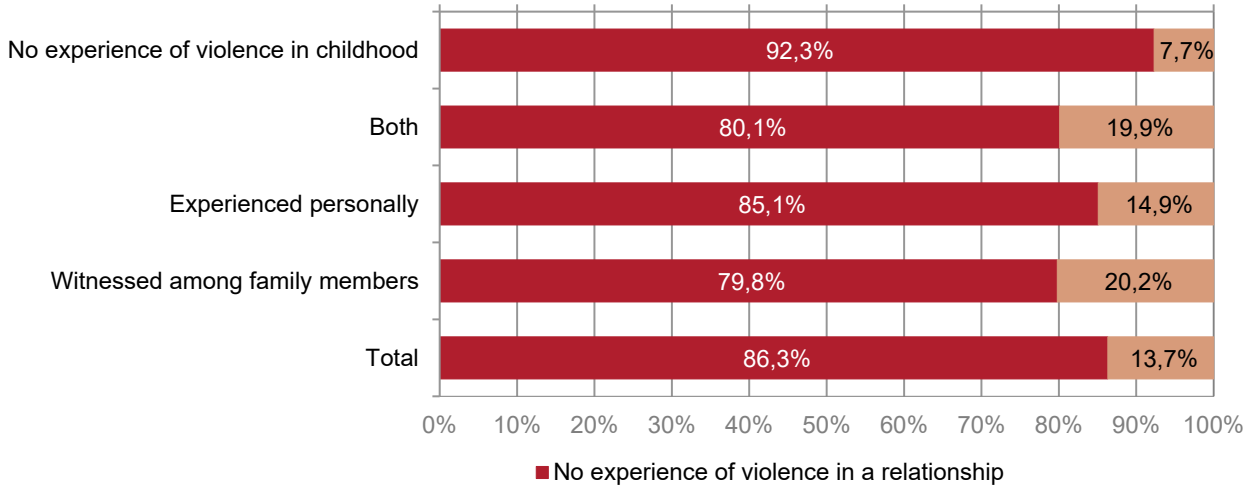
- The onto level refers to personality, individual life history, and one's own actions, conversations, and thought processes that arise in the course of interactions.
- The micro level includes influences from the immediate and close environment (knowledge and experiences of individuals, families and groups) as well as personally held values and norms that flow into daily interactions.
- The meso level refers to social institutions and their processes and subunits. These include behaviour patterns, structures, rules and "public" values and norms in neighbourhoods, districts, clubs and organisations.
- The macro level includes conditions and regulations at the level of society as a whole (municipal, national, international). These include legal provisions, values, norms and the history of a society, as well as access to social support systems, social welfare and the way society deals with professional help.

### Ontological level

The ontogenetic level refers to an individual's life history and their own actions and thought processes. It encompasses the personal experiences and resources that a person develops over the course of their life and their influence on behaviour in current life situations. This chapter highlights specific aspects that were identified in the interviews as conditions for violence and non-violence in the current life situation. It shows that experiences of violence in childhood can both increase the risk of reproducing violent patterns and contribute to the development of resilience. A decisive protective factor for non-violence is self-efficacy. In addition, social and individual skills play a central role, in particular the ability to reflect on and reject traditional mechanisms of violence, a positive attitude and values towards equality, and communication skills such as willingness to compromise, critical thinking and the ability to negotiate conflicts. These are contrasted with patterns that promote experiences of violence in partnerships, such as one's own violent behaviour or self-sacrifice.

Experiences of violence in childhood (witnessing, experiencing and perpetrating violence) have an influence on violence in the current family situation. People who did not experience violence in their childhood are less likely to be affected by violence in their current relationship, with an average of 8% to 14%. In contrast, the highest proportions of violent partnerships are found among people who witnessed violence among family members or were also affected by it themselves, at 20% in each case. It can therefore be seen that people who were themselves victims of violence in childhood are not disproportionately affected by violence in their current partnership. Although this trend is not statistically significant due to the small number of cases, it is nevertheless apparent in the available data. One possible explanation for this could be that victims who experienced violence themselves in childhood are more likely to seek support or recognise violence and are therefore more likely to be able to escape it.

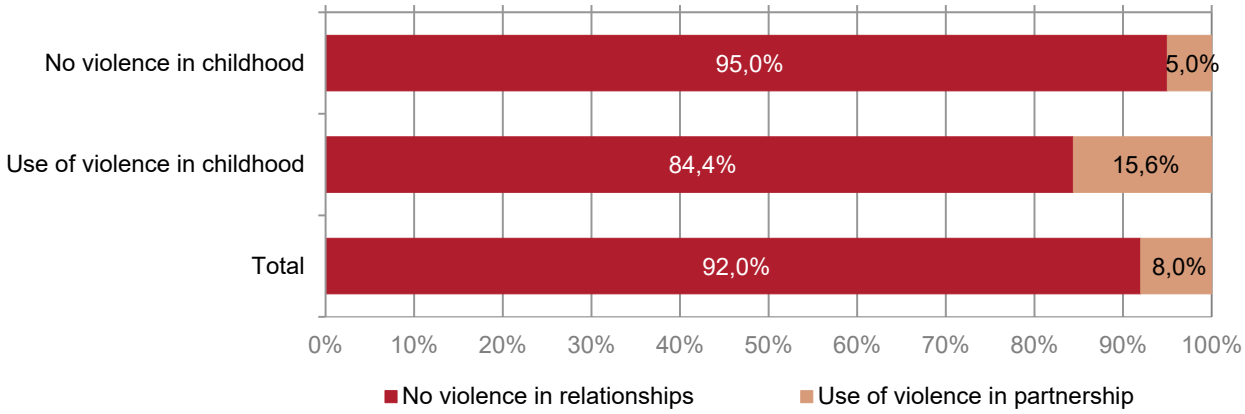
**Figure27: Experience of violence in childhood, by experience of violence in current relationship**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,891, n miss=63, weighted sample.

Similarly to experiences of violence in childhood, there is also a correlation with perpetrating violence in current relationships: if no violence was perpetrated in childhood, violence is also rarely perpetrated in the current relationship (5% share), while this is three times more common (16%) among people who were perpetrators in childhood.

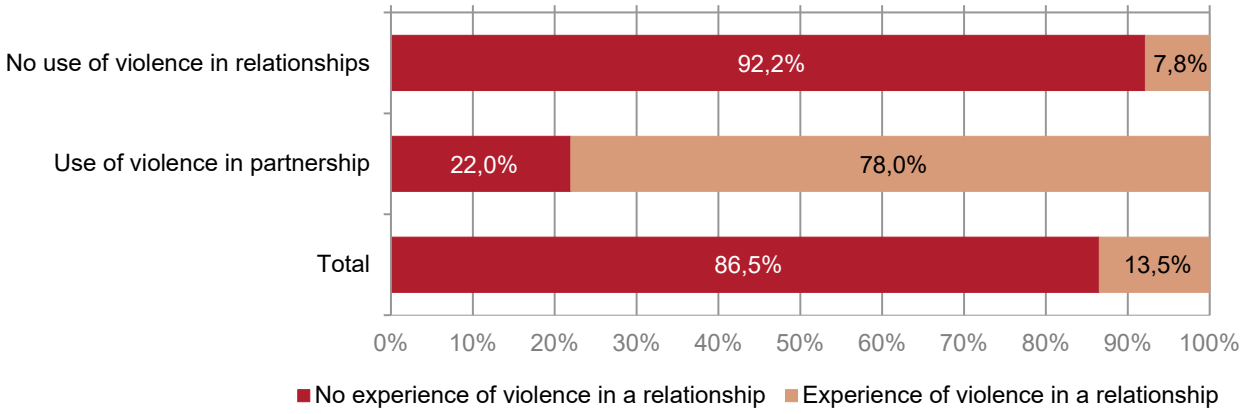
**Figure28: Use of violence in childhood, by use of violence in current relationship**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,891, n miss=50, weighted sample.

The link between experiencing violence and perpetrating violence is also clear when looking at current relationships independently of childhood. It becomes apparent that people who perpetrate violence in their relationship are also more likely to be affected by violence: more than three-quarters of those who perpetrate violence also experience it from their partner. Among those who do not perpetrate violence themselves, this figure is only 8%.

**Figure29: Use of violence in current relationship, by experience of violence**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,891, weighted sample

Similar results were found in the qualitative interviews: interviewees who are currently in violent family situations predominantly reported experiences of violence in childhood. This suggests that violence is being passed down from one generation to the next. Nevertheless, the majority

of respondents currently live in non-violent family situations. This shows that, despite previous experiences of violence, there are ways to break out of cycles of violence.

Conversely, a non-violent childhood can be an important protective factor for a non-violent future. Two-thirds of those who reported a non-violent childhood in the qualitative interviews also currently live in non-violent family situations.

In addition, there is also a small group who live in violent relationships despite having had a non-violent childhood. This shows that, as will be demonstrated below, other factors besides childhood must also play a role.

In summary, it can be said that experiences of violence in childhood increase the risk of living in violent relationships later in life, but do not necessarily lead to this. Similarly, a non-violent childhood can reduce the risk of violence later in life but cannot completely rule it out.

The interviews, therefore, indicate that experiences of violence in childhood are a condition for violence, but also a condition for non-violence in the current life situation. The following quote shows the extent to which violence in childhood, starting with the father, is a condition for violence in the current life situation. The interviewee reflected that they perceive aggressive impulses within themselves, which they associate with the behaviour of their violent father. They described the inner conflict between the patterns of violence learned in childhood and their conscious efforts to exercise self-control.

> "*I have very strong impulses, often the feeling that* [I] *want to hit someone. I know that feeling. I know the impulse to do the same thing as my dad* (...) *I'm 33 and don't have any children for this reason, because I made a clear decision for myself at some point that as long as I'm not able to deal with conflict in such a way that I don't lose control in a fit of rage, I don't want to have children. I want to be in control of myself. I wouldn't want to do that to any child in the world.*"
>
> (54 OP, female, 33)

Experiences of violence in childhood are also used as a point of reference in interviews, with the situations experienced being interpreted as negative examples and consciously distanced from. In particular, the experience of a violent father and a powerless mother lead the interviewee to place a strong emphasis on autonomy and a firm determination not to end up in a similar situation:

> "*That's probably what goes beyond my mother. That you don't have to put up with everything from a man, learned from the negative example. A promise like: Not me. Exactly.*"
>
> (22 ES, female, 48)

Another example of a condition for non-violence is individually developed resilience, which enables a person to consciously decide against violence in their current life situation despite previous experiences of violence in childhood. One interviewee described how she had to take

on responsibility at an early age due to a chaotic family environment and thus developed resilience:

> "*What helped me? Probably the resilience I built up in childhood. I was pretty much left to my own devices in that relationship. Because there was quite a lot of chaos at home. My parents were in a big crisis, and I had to support them rather than them supporting me.*"

(24 JS, female, 56)

This inner strength later helped her to survive a violent relationship and ultimately break free from it. While experiences in the family of origin are often considered a risk factor for the reproduction of patterns of violence, the resulting strength and resilience can also have the opposite effect at the ontogenetic level. The ability to develop one's own coping strategies despite unfavourable conditions enables an active departure from violent dynamics.

The analysis of the interviews shows that experiences of violence in childhood can increase the risk of reproducing violent patterns. At the same time, it becomes clear that self-efficacy is a central prerequisite for non-violence at the ontogenetic level. Self-efficacy is understood as the conviction and confidence in one's own ability to overcome challenges through one's own actions. The promotion of self-efficacy begins in childhood through parenting practices that strengthen autonomy and personal responsibility. One interviewee described how his mother taught him independence at an early age and imposed few restrictions through a liberal attitude towards rules:

> "*But in principle, I think I could fulfil many roles and, of course, I gained a lot of independence from my mother* (...) *Domesticity, yes, but also, how should I put it, a liberal attitude when it comes to rules and such. So there were few restrictions.*"

(53 ES, male, 45)

The experience of being able to make decisions and bear the consequences promotes the development of autonomy and positive self-efficacy expectations. These factors contribute significantly to the fact that the person interviewed now lives in a non-violent family situation characterised by gender equality.

The importance of self-efficacy for actively shaping non-violent life situations is particularly evident in couple relationships. One respondent describes her decision to separate as an expression of her ability to act:

> "(...) *he just always treated me badly. And that's why I said I didn't care. Why should I put up with that? Just because I have everything else. But that's not right. And then I moved out.*"

(62 VS, female, 24)

The conscious decision to separate illustrates how self-efficacy acts as a decisive factor in enabling self-determination and the creation of non-violent and gender-equitable realities of life.

Another condition that can contribute to the emergence of violence is self-sacrifice in family contexts. In particular, constantly prioritising the needs of the family over one's own can lead to exhaustion, dissatisfaction and a neglect of individual self-care. The lack of opportunity for regeneration and for attending to personal needs can lead to frustration and increased potential for conflict in the long term. One interviewee describes this as follows:

> "*Above all, I really lack time for myself. Um, for example, I would like to go to the gym because I am very unhappy with my body. But that's just not possible right now. My husband knows that too. He would make it possible for me, but I don't want to spend the time on it in the current situation with the children. [*Because] *I would feel guilty (*...)."
>
> (43 JS, female, 35)

This decision to put one's own needs aside for the sake of the family and, above all, for the sake of the children can not only lead to a feeling of being controlled by others but also increase the likelihood of conflicts if dissatisfaction manifests itself in the partnership or in everyday family life. Self-sacrifice as a normative expectation of female parental roles reinforces this imbalance and can subsequently promote dynamics that encourage violence.

Other social and individual skills that can be a prerequisite for non-violence in the current family situation include reflection and rejection of traditional punishment and violence mechanisms. The respondents critically examine past experiences of violence and punishment and actively distance themselves from violent patterns of parenting and relationships. Both individual experiences of violence and professional engagement with victim protection play a role here. One respondent clearly spoke out against violence: "*Violence is an absolute no-go for me. I'm relatively strict about that, and it also has to do with the fact that I used to work in victim protection*" *(*53 ES, male, 45). Another respondent reflected on her own experiences of being raised:

> "*That's maybe something I picked up from my parents. This really punishing.* (...) *I don't think I can do that today.* (...) *Maybe you don't need to? I'm not sure if it's necessary.*"
>
> (45 JS, female, 41)

She questioned the necessity of punishment and doubts whether traditional punishment practices are necessary, which indicates a critical examination of previous mechanisms of violence.

Similarly, an attitude and set of values regarding equality as a prerequisite for non-violence in the current family situation is evident. The following quote reflects a clear stance on equality as a fundamental prerequisite for non-violence in family relationships.

> *"And I would never ever do that. I'm not aggressive towards other people either. Never ever in a relationship, because I see people as equals and that's my credo. (*...) *Whether you're the biggest, the smallest, the fattest, the thinnest, a man, a woman or anything in between, you're worth the same and no one has the right (*...) *to impose their opinion on*

*you. And I stick to that in relationships too. Just because I'm the biggest and heaviest, it doesn't mean I know everything and am always right. I know I have genes from my grandfather and my father. They really believe they're always right. That's creepy.*"

(60 JS, male, 60)

In addition to linking equality and non-violence, there is an awareness of breaking with transgenerational norms. Critically examining existing, inherited and self-imposed attitudes and norms is a prerequisite for non-violence.

In addition, personal skills such as negotiation skills, willingness to compromise and the ability to accept criticism are central prerequisites for non-violence. An example of this attitude can be found in the statement: "*It's always a matter of weighing up the pros and cons. And then you try to find a compromise*" *(02 OP, female, 39).* Another passage emphasises that problems are discussed together around the table and solutions are found: "*When we have a problem, we sit down comfortably at the table and say: What is our problem? How can we change it? How can we solve it? And we always find a solution*" *(60 JS, male, 60)*. The importance of communication and emotional control is also emphasised, for example in the statement: "*When we are very angry... then we can also say, 'I'm just too angry right now to talk about it reasonably'*" *(24 JS, female, 56).*

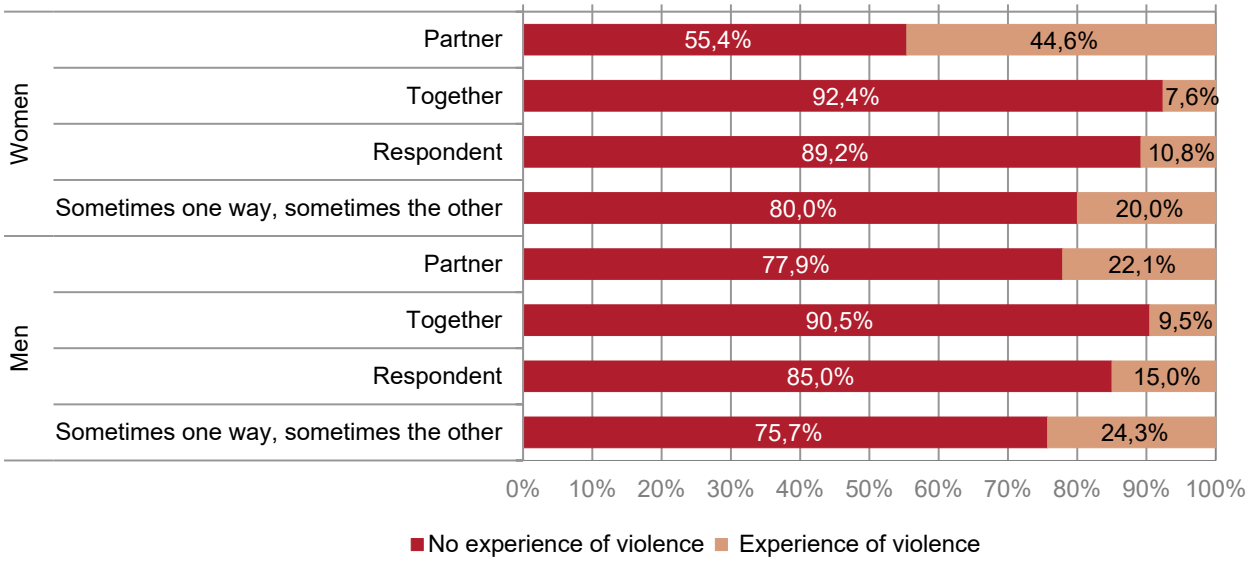
### Micro level

This chapter highlights various aspects of the micro level that can influence violence and non-violence in partnerships and families. It shows how decision-making processes ("last say") in a partnership, the perception of the partner as "caring", the idea and organisation of parenthood, a constructive culture of conflict and the use of non-violent communication influence experiences of violence. It also points out the trivialisation of violence as a subtle but important condition for its continuation. These issues are crucial to understanding how individual and collective behaviours in partnerships and families can reduce or increase the risk of violence.

Statistically significant influences can be observed, for example, in the "last word" in a partnership. When decisions are made jointly, this reduces the risk of violence, regardless of gender.

For women, the likelihood of experiencing violence in a relationship also increases if their partner has the last word: almost half of female respondents say they experience violence if their partner has the last word in the relationship. If decisions are made jointly, this applies to only 8%.

**Figure30: Last say in current relationship, by experience of violence in a relationship**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,891, n miss=34, weighted sample.

Equal decision-making processes in couple relationships are characterised by mutual dialogue. This not only leads to greater satisfaction with the decisions made but also helps to avoid conflictual dynamics and violence. One interviewee described this using several joint decisions made with their partner:

> *"At the beginning of 2019, we considered investing in a flat in Vienna, but we both decided against it because it didn't feel like the right time for us. A year later, at the beginning of 2020, we both decided to buy a plot of land* (...) *The decision not to have children was also a joint decision and a natural gut feeling* (...)."

(18 JS, female, 31)

Joint decision-making is a central condition for non-violence in couple relationships. Equal negotiation processes reduce asymmetrical power relations and prevent dependencies that could promote violence. This is also confirmed by quantitative results, which show that couples with an egalitarian decision-making structure experience significantly less violence.

While equal decision-making processes in couple relationships are a central element of non-violence, it is evident that asymmetrical power relations and control over key life decisions significantly increase the risk of violence. An extreme example of this can be found in the experience of one interviewee, who described a relationship characterised by strong dependence and control:

> *"He restricted me a lot, forbade me from doing many things and interfered a lot in my life, which I wasn't aware of at the time, but in retrospect I was very much so.* (...) *No more social media,* (...) *weighing myself every day. He decided what I ate and things like that.* (...) *So he then made me* (...) *sell my car, quit my job, give up my flat, so that I was completely dependent on them.*"

(43 JS, female, 35)

It was only when the control extended to her child that she recognised the violence in the relationship and decided to separate: "*Um, strangely enough, it didn't bother me at all when it only affected me. When [*it] *was done to my son, that's when I ended it. So that was a cut-off point.*" *(*43 JS, female, 35 years old). This example illustrates how the absence of equal negotiation processes can lead to a complete loss of autonomy by systematically undermining freedom of choice and financial and social independence.

The assessment of whether the partner is perceived as caring for friends, the respondent themselves and the well-being of others also has an influence on experiences of violence in the partnership. If partners are perceived as caring, this reduces the likelihood of experiencing violence, regardless of gender. Among female respondents, around 5% report experiencing violence in their relationship when their partner is perceived as equally caring. The figure is higher when there is an imbalance: 9% when the partner cares more and as high as 26% when the partner is perceived as caring less.

Among male respondents, on the other hand, the least violence in a relationship is experienced when the partner is perceived as caring more – here the figure is 10%, compared to 13% when there is a balance and 21% when the partner is perceived as caring less.

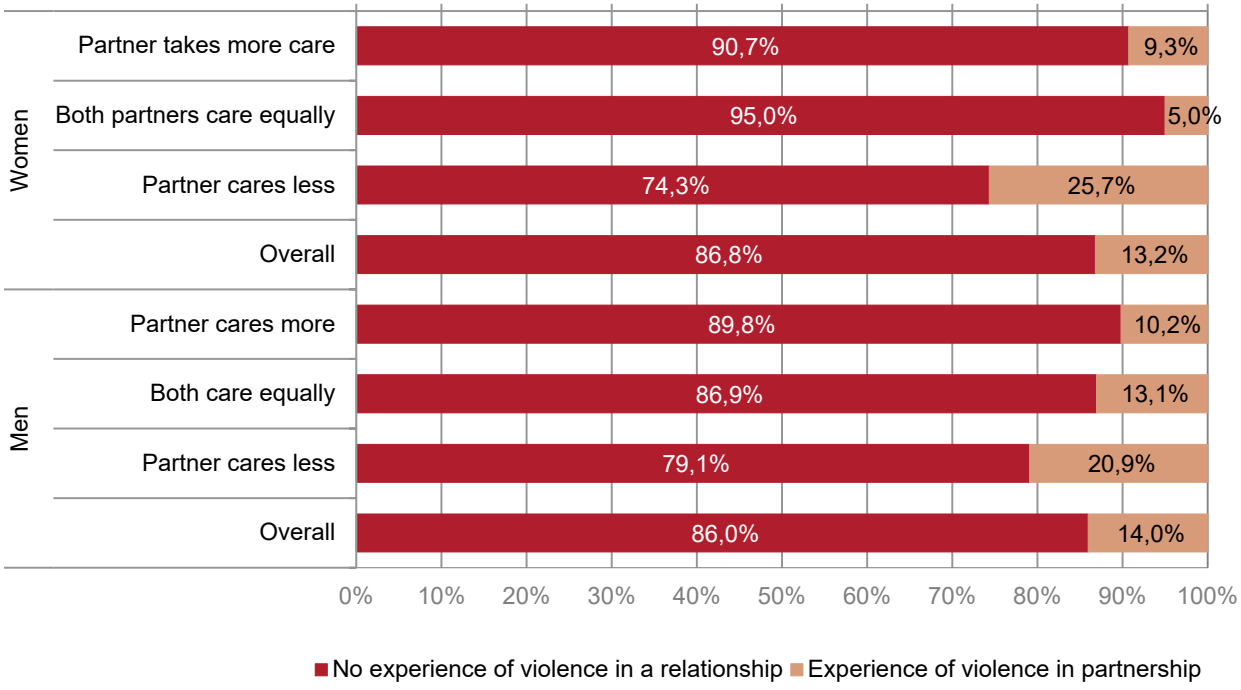



**Figure31: Caring relationship, by experience of violence in current relationship**

Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,891, n miss=121, weighted sample.

In the interviews, the topic of parenting was frequently mentioned in connection with the division of care tasks within the current family situation. It became clear that the way parenting is

organised contributes significantly to non-violence in the family. Three key aspects can be identified here: Firstly, the importance of transparent and clear parenting structures is evident. One interviewee describes this using consistent rules which, in conjunction with open communication, form clear structures on the one hand and a basis of trust on the other:

> "*But we had relatively strict rules.* (...) *Our son* (...) *had fixed bedtimes, which meant that he didn't have access to digital media until he was four.* (...) *We had very cool rules. This helped us get through puberty wonderfully. We had a very, very good atmosphere for communication. He knew exactly which problems he could come to us with, namely any problem. We always solved things through communication.*"
>
> (60 JS, male, 60)

Secondly, the ability to cooperate as parents despite separation also plays an important role. One example of this is the conscious separation of personal conflicts from the role of parent:

> "*Then I said, well, that* [the lack of contact between father and daughter shortly after the parents separated] *can't be. That's between the two of us. And then the daughter doesn't have to suffer. (...) She needs both parents, and I don't want them to be at loggerheads or anything. I don't do that and it's not right, because he's her dad and I'm her mum and she should get on well with both of them.*"
>
> (35 OP, female, 61)

Thirdly, respondents emphasise the need to be a non-violent role model for their children – especially in response to their own experiences of violence in childhood. One interviewee reflected:

> "*I am absolutely clear that violence is not acceptable* (...) *It is so important to me that these girls grow up differently than I did, that they grow up feeling empowered, that they don't experience some kind of stupid male role model where you just have to submit and adapt and be nice and kind.*"
>
> (22 ES, female, 48)

These narratives illustrate that parenting practices at the micro level – from educational structures with transparent rules and open communication to cooperative parenting despite separation to the conscious decision to be a non-violent role model – determine non-violent family situations. This also includes a positive attitude towards child-free time for parents.

> *"It works for us and we have it. Because she started going to a childminder when she was just one year old, I never saw it as something negative. When you put your children somewhere else, when you take some time out as a couple, someone else looks after the children.* (...) *I've always seen it as something positive. Exactly.*"
>
> (02 OP, female, 39)

The opportunity to have temporary relief from childcare is an essential resource that can relieve parents and thus act as a condition for non-violence at the micro level. A central aspect that

was also discussed in the interviews are unfulfilled expectations surrounding parenthood as a potential condition for violence in the family. Especially in the early stages of parenthood, an imbalance in the division of care work can lead to frustration and conflict.

> "*The first time we had a serious argument. Our first child was very young, and it was a classic situation. My husband needed a little time to grow into his role as a father. He carried on as normal. He was out all weekend. Yes, and then I got angry and threw a few plates.*"
>
> (24 JS, female, 56)

Violence, such as raising one's voice and throwing plates in this example, can be interpreted in such contexts as an expression of stress, a need for recognition and relief in situations of excessive demands, or as an attempt to (re)negotiate family roles. This is because the reality of parenthood often contrasts with idealised and romanticised notions, which can lead to disappointment and excessive demands. Another interviewee described this as follows:

> "*So even with my second child, I noticed how this intensified.* (...) *But there are also times when I really think, what have I done to myself? That wasn't a good idea. Or even in the sense of: I'm a bad mother because I'm causing myself this stress, and then I can't stand it, and I take it out on the children.*"
>
> (37 VS, female, 39 years old)

This discrepancy between society's expectations of fulfilling and harmonious parenthood and the actual stresses of everyday life can intensify feelings of being overwhelmed and lead to violent behaviour in stressful situations.

Similarly, the multiple burdens of parenting and paid work, as well as the associated coordination of numerous tasks, can be a significant source of stress. The need to juggle work commitments, doctors' appointments and children's leisure activities leads to constant tension, which can manifest itself in feeling overwhelmed. One interviewee describes this as follows:

> "*I find it challenging and, of course, difficult to always have all these appointments, doctors' appointments, paediatricians' appointments.* (...) *So you really have quite a lot of everyday appointments, then you go to work, then you have to stay late at work. So, somehow, there's always something going on. Getting everything sorted out. The children do quite a lot of courses. Yes, I find it challenging* (...) *I get annoyed much more quickly or think to myself, this can't be happening. Please, it doesn't have to be like this.*
>
> (37 VS, female, 39 years old)

The interviews also revealed indications that the challenges associated with parenthood and stressful periods of excessive demands are a prerequisite for violence. Even in families where care work is divided fairly between the parents, stress can lead to violent behaviour, as the following example shows:

"*Yes, I do find it challenging with the children, time and time again.* (...) *And yes, sometimes I really do reach my limits. It can happen that I really shout at her or threaten her and say: 'Listen, if you don't do this and that, then we can't do this and that. Show her the consequences. She [*the daughter] *can really make me see red. It's unbelievable.*"

(37 VS, female, 39 years old)

The micro level encompasses the influences of the immediate social environment, in particular, family structures and relationships. In addition to the way in which children are brought up, expectations regarding cohesion within the family also play a key role in the occurrence or prevention of violence. Forced family loyalty can be a prerequisite for violence by stabilising power structures within the family and promoting the acceptance of violence within the family. When family belonging is considered a top priority, conflicts and violent dynamics can be trivialised or even legitimised. This is illustrated by an interviewee who describes how, despite verbal and physical violence within the family, maintaining family cohesion was considered an overriding principle:

"*So that this family thing is held in very high regard and* (...) *that you shout at each other and throw things at each other and cry,* (...) *that you're still a family and still stick together.* (...) *My mum's classic saying was always: You only have one sister; you only have this one sister. So you have to be nice and kind to her.*"

(21 JS, female, 29)

This legitimisation of violence limits the options available to those affected by a violent family system to distance themselves from or resist violence.

In addition to the nuclear family and partnership, social networks such as friendships and extended family members also represent potentially stabilising or destabilising conditions. While supportive social relationships are protective factors against violence, stressful dynamics within the social environment can promote conditions that encourage violence. The following interview shows how such factors manifest themselves in a complex interplay. The interviewee described how she sought refuge with a long-time friend after the end of her violent relationship. However, this support was undermined by existing family structures and gender-specific role expectations:

"*Somehow it didn't work out with her because her boyfriend attacked her and said: 'She's here, she's crazy, she doesn't have a brain in her head, and she's looking after our two children as well.*'"

(62 VS, female, 24)

As a result, the interviewee had to move out of her friend's place and, due to a lack of alternatives, decided to move back in with her former partner. Shortly afterwards, she took in her brother, whom she perceives as a supportive person. This led to further conflicts and another move:

"*Then my big brother moved in with us because he wasn't doing well. He had been in the Green Circle* [Grüner Kreis Ambulantes Beratungs- und Betreuungszentrum Graz] *for nine months. (...) Of course, he stopped going there on the day I moved back into the flat. Then I said: (...) You can live here. (...) And then the child's father and I started arguing again. Why does he have to be there when he behaves like that?*"

(62 VS, female, 24)

In addition to the partnership and the nuclear family, the social environment must be seen not only as a protective factor but also as a risk factor for violence. Precarious living conditions, a lack of social support and gender-specific role assignments can lead to those affected remaining in cycles of violence or these cycles becoming even more entrenched.

A constructive culture of conflict resolution is a central prerequisite for non-violence at the micro level, as it views conflicts as malleable negotiation processes and prevents escalation. One respondent describes how she perceives conflict as productive rather than destructive:

"*For me, arguing doesn't have a negative connotation, but rather it's this negotiation and, in my experience, it's always okay and now we're getting along again and now we're good again and now we're starting over! For me, it's simply a yes, a negotiation in the broadest sense.*"

(33 OP, female, 35)

A positive culture of conflict is characterised by various features. In the following interview, the interviewee emphasises the importance of respectful and open communication and the ability to accept criticism:

"*Yes, I'm someone who likes to argue openly. I also like it when these issues are addressed.* (...) *So I really try to send 'I' messages, describe my impressions, not be underhanded, but I still want it to be addressed.* (...) *But I also want it to be said out loud and I want what's important to me to be said. I want what the other person says to be taken seriously. And if someone says to me, 'You're so patronising' or 'You have no idea', then I take that to heart and work on it. So I do take criticism on board.*"

(56 VS, female, 30)

A positive culture of conflict is also characterised by the ability to consciously integrate emotional regulation into conflict processes. In this context, another respondent emphasised the need to acknowledge emotions, give them space and, at the same time, develop mechanisms to prevent escalation:

"*We learned together that you try to talk about it. And if there are too many emotions at the moment, you try to calm down first and then talk about it.* (...) *Then we can also say: I'm just too angry right now to talk about it reasonably. And then we come back to the topic. An hour later or a day later.*"

(24 JS, female, 56)

Listening, setting boundaries and accepting them are also part of a constructive culture of conflict resolution: *"And then I said it out loud. It was accepted, and that was something I wasn't used to* [from my childhood]" *(43 JS, female, 35).* This statement makes it clear that the interviewee is consciously practising a different form of communication in her current life situation than she experienced in her childhood. Her willingness to address conflicts openly and the fact that these concerns are accepted show a clear departure from violent communication experiences. This shows that respectful discussion, in which the needs and boundaries of those involved are recognised, has a violence-preventing effect as part of a culture of conflict resolution.

Several interviews reveal that women* in particular, take responsibility for a constructive culture of conflict resolution in relationships and actively address conflicts:

> "*But if there have been any difficulties, we've talked about them. But actually, it's always been me who initiated it, because I took the first step and said, 'That doesn't suit me, we need to talk about it. That's not okay for me.*' (...) *Yes, we discuss things thoroughly.*"
>
> (25 VS, female, 28)

These patterns point to internalised gender roles in which communicative and reflective conflict management is more commonly associated with women. Where a culture of debate is established, conflicts can be resolved without escalating into destructive or even violent patterns.

However, interviews also revealed the extent to which a lack of or a destructive culture of conflict, in which conflicts are not communicated or dealt with appropriately, can lead to violence. The interviewee described her experiences from two relationships:

> "[Name of first partner] *just always left. You wouldn't see him for days or anything. But* [name of second partner] *always came home when there was an argument or something. But there was a lot of verbal abuse. At least he came home.* [Name of first *partner] just left and you didn't hear from him for days, weeks.*"
>
> (62 VS, female, 24)

This example illustrates two different ways of dealing with conflict, which escalate into different forms of violence. The first partner simply walked away in conflict situations, which is a form of avoidance and at the same time prevents healthy communication and the possibility of reconciliation (psychological violence: silent treatment). With the second partner, conflicts turned into verbal arguments that ended in physical violence. This example shows that the lack of a stable and respectful culture of conflict resolution, in which conflicts are addressed openly and resolved constructively, can be an important factor in the emergence of violence in relationships.

Closely related to the culture of conflict is the issue of non-violent communication as a prerequisite for non-violence. Non-violent communication makes it possible to negotiate conflicts in a respectful and reflective manner, rather than reproducing destructive communication

patterns that potentially escalate dynamics in partnerships and family relationships. One respondent emphasises that tolerating destructive communication behaviour, such as shouting or days of silence, is unacceptable to her:

> *"And that these things are simply not talked about. Or that some things are tolerated that were an absolute no-go for me. Like shouting at each other during a conversation. Or being treated passively aggressively, with ' ' days of silence, not talking to each other for days on end, things like that. If my partner does that, then for me that's the end of the relationship, that's a reason to break up."*

(21 JS, female, 29)

This statement makes it clear that non-violent communication is not just a technique for resolving conflicts, but a fundamental prerequisite for maintaining respectful and equal relationships. Another interview showed how strongly non-violent communication can be established as a conscious practice in partnerships and social environments. The interviewee described how she uses reflective questions from non-violent communication, such as "*What is that doing to you right now?*" or "*Have I understood you correctly?*", to avoid misunderstandings. In escalating situations, it is also common to involve external reference persons in order to avoid resolving conflicts impulsively:

> *"I'd like to discuss this with you. But not just the two of us. Would it be okay if we asked Anna to join us? Because I need reassurance, otherwise I get too emotional and end up shouting at you."*

(03 VS, female, 38)

At the same time, she emphasises that this type of communication requires effort: "*Sometimes* it's *really hard because you think, 'Can't we just yell at each other and slam the door and then it's over?' But no, we never say that. We talk through every little thing*" *(03 VS, female, 38).* The interviewee also explains how non-violent communication between her and other adults, such as her partner, is transferred to her daughter. In a difficult situation in which the interviewee was crying and her daughter noticed, the approach of non-violent communication was adopted directly. The daughter asked, "*What do you need?*" and offered solutions such as "*Calm down. Tickle me. Joy*" (*03 VS, female, 38 years old)*. The results of the interview analysis show that the conscious decision not to resolve conflicts through outbursts of anger or aggressive communication, but through open, respectful and solution-oriented conversations, contributes to non-violence. The practice of non-violent communication is therefore not only an individual decision, but also a social strategy that strengthens the values of respect, understanding and cooperation in family and partnership relationships.

The trivialisation of violence within the family can be a central condition for its continuation, as violent acts are normalised and their consequences relativised. One interviewee recounts violence perpetrated by the mother towards the children, as well as violence between the parents:

> "*Well, my wife is still deeply embarrassed that she once lost her temper with the children.* (...) *The children took it very well, because I see it the same way: emotional reactions, between you and me [because] I would never say that out loud,* (...) *are something children can cope with quite well.* (...) *We went through a phase where we occasionally got physical with each other. Yes, definitely in times of great need and despair and when we were under a lot of stress* (...) *and building our careers, etc.* (...) *We often reached our limits during* that time."
>
> (17 ES, male, 76)

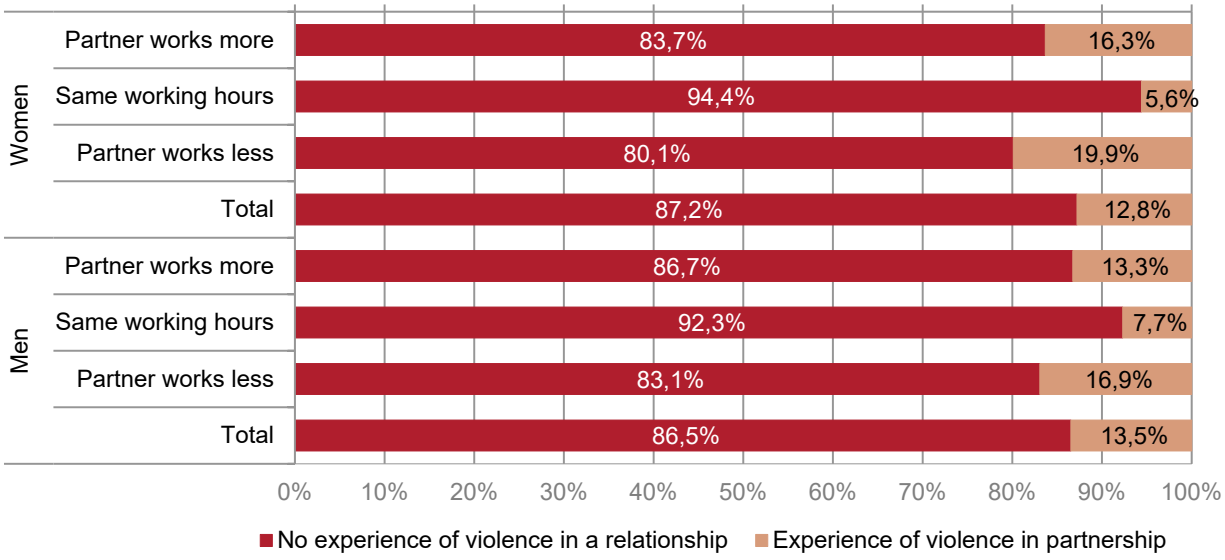
The interviewee considers these incidents to be unproblematic. In addition, the quote "*between us,* (...) *I would never say that out loud*" *(ibid.)* reveals the discrepancy between individual justification and social norms of non-violent parenting. Furthermore, the respondent describes that there has been repeated violence in the relationship in the past, especially during periods of high stress due to work, childcare and social demands. The link between stress and violence, as well as the subsequent relativisation "*We've often been pushed to our limits*" (*ibid.)* suggest that violent behaviour is not seen as transgression but as excusable. By presenting emotional reactions as "manageable" and excessive demands as a legitimate excuse for violence, there is no reflection on violent patterns. The trivialisation of violence thus functions as a stabilising factor or as a condition for violence.

### Meso level

This chapter examines the institutional factors that can influence violence in current family situations. These include structures, rules, values and norms of institutions such as gainful employment, institutions such as schools, associations and neighbourhoods. The GEQ-AT survey identified conditions that can promote or prevent the occurrence and dynamics of intra-family violence. These include, for example, the division of labour and conditions of gainful employment, social pressure from the environment/neighbourhood/community, institutional responsiveness to violence, and expertise that is used for the common good.

There are differences in the relationship between working hours and violence: when working hours are the same, fewer respondents report experiencing violence in their relationship: 6% of female respondents and 8% of male respondents. The figures are higher when working hours are unevenly distributed.

**Figure32: Working time ratio, by experience of violence in current partnership**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,891, n miss=312, weighted sample.

Overall, it can therefore be assumed that a balanced distribution of paid and unpaid work and resources, joint decision-making and a balanced level of care for others can influence the risk of experiencing violence in a relationship.

The qualitative interviews show that the extent of paid work and the associated economic resource relationships within partnerships can be key factors in the emergence of violence. One respondent reported that physical violence only occurred in her relationship after the power balance shifted due to changes in their paid work. Whereas her partner had previously earned more and dominated financial decisions, she took on this role after contributing more to the household income. Her partner reacted with resistance and violence to compensate for the imbalance that had arisen for him:

> "*Physical violence was never an issue for us. But then that actually changed.* (...) *I think it just came from his powerlessness and the fact that the power balance had completely shifted. Of course, I talked to him about it, just like he had always done with me before. 'Can you pay for that? No, then I get to decide.' And that's what I did.* (...) *He tried to compensate for the imbalance that had arisen on a different level somehow.*"
>
> (05 VS, female, 33)

This dynamic can be understood in the context of traditional masculinity requirements. In hegemonic gender orders (Connell, 2005), masculinity is closely linked to gainful employment, control over economic resources and decision-making power. If this model is thrown into crisis by change, it can be perceived as a threat to masculinity, leading to compensatory measures – including violence. Violence acts as a means of restoring a position of power within the partnership, highlighting the close interconnection between gainful employment, power relations and gender norms.

However, gainful employment not only influences current family relationships through economic factors. High levels of stress at work can also be seen as a structural condition for the emergence of violence in family relationships. The increasing demands of professional and private life, especially when education, gainful employment and family responsibilities accumulate, can push individuals to their limits. This is reflected in the statement of one respondent who reports that physical violence repeatedly occurred in his relationship during times of extreme stress:

> "*In great need and despair and under great stress, with all the therapy training and the housing project and small children and building a career, etc. So there was already a lot of tension* (...) *and we often found ourselves at our limits.*"
>
> (17 ES, male, 76)

The density of obligations described here points to structural overload, in which stress increases the likelihood of violence. Particularly relevant here is the interplay of professional and private stressors, which can facilitate violent emotional outbursts, such as "*slipping up*" *(17 ES, male, 76 years old)* in moments of overload.

In contrast, it has been shown that professional autonomy can act as a protective factor against violence. One respondent described how he quit his job because he was in a hierarchical relationship of dependency with his superior, which was incompatible with his ideas of autonomy and self-fulfilment:

> "*I* (...) *simply noticed over the last three years that there were differences of opinion with my current boss.* (...) *And then I took the step of resigning because I think it would have become quite unhealthy otherwise.*"
>
> (ES 53, male, 45)

By freeing himself from this structural predicament, he defused potential conflict dynamics. This example highlights the importance of professional self-determination in avoiding conflicts, particularly when individuals have the opportunity to leave stressful working relationships. While high levels of occupational stress can lead to violent reactions as a result of structural overload, occupational autonomy enables individuals to regulate their own stress and avoid escalating conflict dynamics.

Social pressure from neighbours, clubs or other institutions is a prerequisite for violence in family contexts, especially when high professional and private demands coincide with structural deficits such as a lack of childcare or psychological support. An interview reveals how social pressure from the environment promotes a dynamic that encourages violence by contributing to the excessive demands placed on those affected. The interviewee talks about his partner's physical violence towards the children and between him and his partner, and reports how this led to excessive demands and violence: "*There was a situation where many others just shook their heads at how we were doing everything, and we often found ourselves at our limits*" *(17 ES, male, 76)*. The interviewee suggests that the social environment not only perceives the

extraordinary strain on the family, but also evaluates it. The head-shaking can be interpreted in different ways: on the one hand, it can be understood as an expression of social criticism, which makes the affected family feel pressured to hide their difficulties or not admit that they have reached their breaking point. On the other hand, it could also be interpreted as silent recognition of the family's efforts to overcome these challenges. In both cases, however, a central problem remains: the family does not take advantage of offers of support or recognise that it is overwhelmed. This increases the risk of intra-family conflict and violence, as no adequate coping strategies are developed and no external assistance is sought. Another interview illustrates how social pressure in a village environment can make separation seem like a social stigma:

> *"Well, that was the separation back then. I mean, you have to imagine, in such a small village, it's crazy. We were considered the dream couple. No.* (...) *because you never heard anything bad about the relationship.* (...) *And in our village, almost everyone knows everyone."*

(57 OP, female, 57)

This interview also shows that social expectations can have a significant influence on family situations. Social control can lead to individuals not communicating intra-family conflicts openly and transparently for fear of being seen as incapable or a failure, increasing the likelihood that violence will be suppressed or trivialised. Conditions operating at the meso level make violence an expression of structural and social constraints that can escalate in certain life situations.

Another condition for violence at the meso level is the institutional responsibility gap, which manifests itself in structural barriers and insufficient intervention by social institutions. One respondent reports that, in her experience, institutional actors such as child and youth welfare services only intervene when violence against children has already reached an escalated stage: *"So I hear in the consultations [*what] *violence happens to children. Yes, that it is taken seriously. It's crazy" (22 ES, female, 48).* This statement underscores that preventive measures are often lacking and that a response only comes after serious incidents have occurred. This structural inertia means that affected children remain exposed to violence for long periods of time without adequate protective mechanisms in place. In addition, the structural overload of social institutions exacerbates the problem:

> *"I've done everything. Now it's up to the youth welfare office to take action. Or not, or whatever. Mhm, exactly! And once again, I'm responsible for everything. Exactly the decisions."*

(22 ES, female, 48)

Institutions such as the youth welfare office are forced by chronic resource shortages to prioritise cases according to urgency. As a result, the most serious cases are given priority, while

initial indications of violence are often only addressed once the situation has already escalated. This institutional limitation means that preventive interventions are not taken and violence can develop unhindered over long periods of time.

The problem of institutional shortcomings in violence intervention and prevention is illustrated in an interview with a professional. The interviewee talked about her precarious working conditions and inadequate structural support in a children's home. She described the extreme challenges in her professional environment:

> "*The children were really difficult because of what had happened to them before. Yes, they all had a history of abuse* (...). *Then suddenly they stood behind me with knives and wanted to kill me, or they just chewed on window panes and wanted to throw the pieces at my head.* (...) *It's so irresponsible to leave children like that with a 19-year-old girl.*"
>
> (42 OP, female, 26)

Not only those affected, but also the professionals themselves are exposed to enormous stress. The lack of institutional support and staff shortages mean that educational professionals are pushed to their limits, which can ultimately contribute to the failure to adequately secure safe spaces for those affected. The interviewee also emphasises the problem of inadequate qualification requirements and institutional negligence. This structural misjudgement shows that inadequate professional resources and a lack of institutional reflection on the conditions necessary to protect vulnerable groups can contribute to an escalation of violence. The interviews revealed that it is not a lack of responsibility but structural overload that is a key factor in violence.

At the same time, there is also a strong trust in institutions, especially the police, when it comes to protection from physical violence. One interviewee emphasises that she would act without hesitation in such a case: "*If there was even the slightest hint of physical violence, [*I] *would call the police immediately*" *(42 OP, female, 26).* In this case, this trust stems from family connections that convey a positive image of the institution:

> "*My brother is in the criminal investigation department.* (...) *But I know that he is such a conscientious, good person and that his colleagues are like him. So I know that nothing can go wrong. More or less.*"
>
> (42 OP, female, 26)

The acquisition of knowledge and specific training are central conditions for non-violence at the meso level. Through targeted training, individuals can acquire skills that contribute not only to the prevention of violence but also to the active promotion of non-violence. One respondent described how his comprehensive training enables him to work preventively in schools and institutions:

> *"I'm a good talker; I'm good at convincing children and young people.* (...) [I] *then completed all the trainer training courses.* (...) *And then I said: I'd like to introduce a safety concept in schools.* (...) *I then trained as a sex educator, an academic leisure educator for*

*sport and violence prevention, I am a gender officer, I also develop child protection concepts, among other things* (...) *and I have worked very, very well in this area.*"

(60 JS, male, 60)

Knowledge is not only used as an individual resource here but also contributes to social responsibility by being actively integrated into education and prevention programmes. Through the development of violence prevention programmes, especially in the field of child and youth work, knowledge is used as a stabilising factor to prevent violence and establish long-term structures that promote non-violent conflict resolution.

### Macro level

This chapter examines the factors in society as a whole that can influence violence in current family situations. These include legal regulations such as the Violence Protection Act, which provides protective measures for victims of domestic violence, and the Austrian maternity and paternity leave provisions, which offer financial and employment security for parents. At the macro level, the questionnaire survey and interview analysis identified key influencing factors such as economic situation and financial dependencies. These conditions shape the scope for action and power relations in relationships and can both increase the risk of violence and offer protection against it.

With regard to the current financial situation, this has an influence on acts of violence in partnerships among women*, whereby the following applies: Women* who are financially worse off experience violence in their current partnership at an above-average rate of 27% compared to 14%. Among men*, on the other hand, the economic situation has no significant influence on experiences of violence.

**Figure33: Financial situation, by experience of violence in current relationship**


Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,891, n miss=38, weighted sample.

Financial dependence as a condition for violence and financial independence as a condition for non-violence were also identified in the interviews. One interviewee described how men* in particular, in his environment, remain in unhappy relationships for financial reasons:

> *"And there are a lot of men my age or younger who have come up to me and said, 'I admire you for doing that. I don't have the courage to do it. I'd like to, but I don't dare because we're financially tied together.'" And then I saw that there are many people who simply don't get divorced because they don't dare to take the financial step. And funnily enough, it was mostly men who said, 'You know, I've got a house now, I've got this, I've got that. And if I get divorced now, I'll lose everything and so on and so forth. I don't want that anymore. I'd rather stay together.* (...) *I don't want to sit at breakfast and then have a knife fight. If you could pass me the butter, please. I don't want that. I want to be just as happy in my old age."*
>
> (60 JS, male, 60)

Financial interdependence within partnerships acts as a form of structural dependency that restricts freedom of action and limits individual decision-making. Financial dependence is also a consequence or indication of unequal power relations and violent structures in relationships. In this context, the distinction made by Joan B. Kelly and Michael P. Johnson (2008) between different forms of intimate partner violence can be applied. Their research shows that, particularly in cases of coercive controlling violence, economic dependence is a central instrument of control that prevents those affected from leaving the relationship or defending themselves against violence. This makes it clear that financial autonomy is not only a prerequisite for individual freedom of choice, but can also be a prerequisite for freedom from violence.

At the same time, another example from the interviews shows that financial independence can facilitate separations and defuse potential conflicts. One interviewee reported that she achieved an amicable divorce and thus secured her long-term autonomy through a marriage contract and a conscious decision to avoid dependent relationships. These results illustrate that financial independence can be a key factor in avoiding conflictual and potentially violent relationship constellations.

> *"We drew up a prenuptial agreement during the separation phase, which settled everything. And then I said that if he wanted a divorce, he would have to go ahead with it because I didn't want to get divorced.* (...) *And then the divorce happened* (...) *And then she [the judge] asked me, because we had said that we were waiving all claims against each other, including the widow's or widower's pension. Yes, um.* (...) *Are you sure you want to waive it?* (...) *Then I said I would waive it. I want to waive it. I said that I had been working full-time since I was nineteen, with only two years of maternity leave. I know what my pension will be, and I can live on that, and I don't need it. And then it's time to be content, and then it went through. So we are completely separate financially. Also for the future."*
>
> (35 OP, female, 61)

It is striking that comparatively few conditions at the macro level were mentioned by respondents in the qualitative interview survey. This can be interpreted to mean that explanations for violence (or non-violence) tend to be sought at the ontogenesis and micro levels, while structural conditions that shape the individual situation receive less attention. This is also reflected in the analysis in the low number of codes at the macro level.

## Violence and violence constellations in childhood

Although the focus of this study is on violence and non-violence in the current life situation of the respondents, the following two chapters also systematically present experiences of violence and non-violence in the family of origin.

The questionnaire survey shows that experiences of violence were more common in childhood than in the relationship. However, experiences of violence in childhood were asked about in general, while those in the relationship were limited to the last year. Approximately one-third of respondents reported having experienced verbal abuse and punishment themselves during their childhood. In addition, psychological violence in the family of origin was also reported in the qualitative interviews. One interviewee described the verbal abuse recorded in the quantitative survey and illustrated how psychological violence was experienced as a powerful disciplinary tool in the family context. *"It was violent (...) but not in the sense of* physical *violence, more like shouting, accusing, then ignoring, punishing with silence" (61 JS, female, 32).* Another respondent added:

"*Well, I have to say that. Physical violence, definitely not. But psychological violence, yes. Yes, I guess to a normal extent – as is the case, I think, when you're raising children, you use expressions that* are *perhaps not entirely non-violent*, *yes.*"

(45 JS, female, 41)

This clearly shows that psychological violence against children is often trivialised as a disciplinary measure and perceived as "normal," which points to a societal tendency to downplay this form of violence.

Approximately a quarter of those surveyed had experienced physical violence themselves, with this being more common among men (28.5% vs. 22.8%). Experiences of physical violence were also described in the interviews: "*Yes,* (...) *but it was also in the past that my brother and I were slapped. So that was also physical violence in that sense*" *(61 JS, female, 32).* Another interview passage shows how prevalent violence was in the immediate social environment during childhood:

"*Sometimes it was settled with* shouting *or* hitting*. We children always had to be careful when we noticed the adults – and there were a lot of adults around us. My uncle and aunt lived in the house next door. My uncle was also very difficult. Um, exactly. So it was chaos. Chaos, I mean, in challenging situations it was just chaos.* It *was overwhelming. As a child, you just try to switch off and quickly learn* (...) *what you can and can't do.*"

(24 JS, female, 56)

Female respondents, on the other hand, report more frequently that they have been affected by sexual abuse: this applies to 6.4% of women* and 2.0% of men*. In the interviews, only women* reported experiencing sexualised violence. One interviewee describes: "*My father was a paedophile.* (...) *And at some point, I was the only girl available*" *(15 VS, female, 55 years old).* This quote vividly illustrates the severity and family environment of sexualised violence and supports the quantitative findings on the higher incidence of women*. Male interviewees, on the other hand, reported witnessing or suspecting sexualised violence against female family members. One interviewee said:

"*Um, yes, that's actually a very difficult topic for me. I'll try to say it anyway. It turned out later, years later, that our father had sexually abused my sister.*"

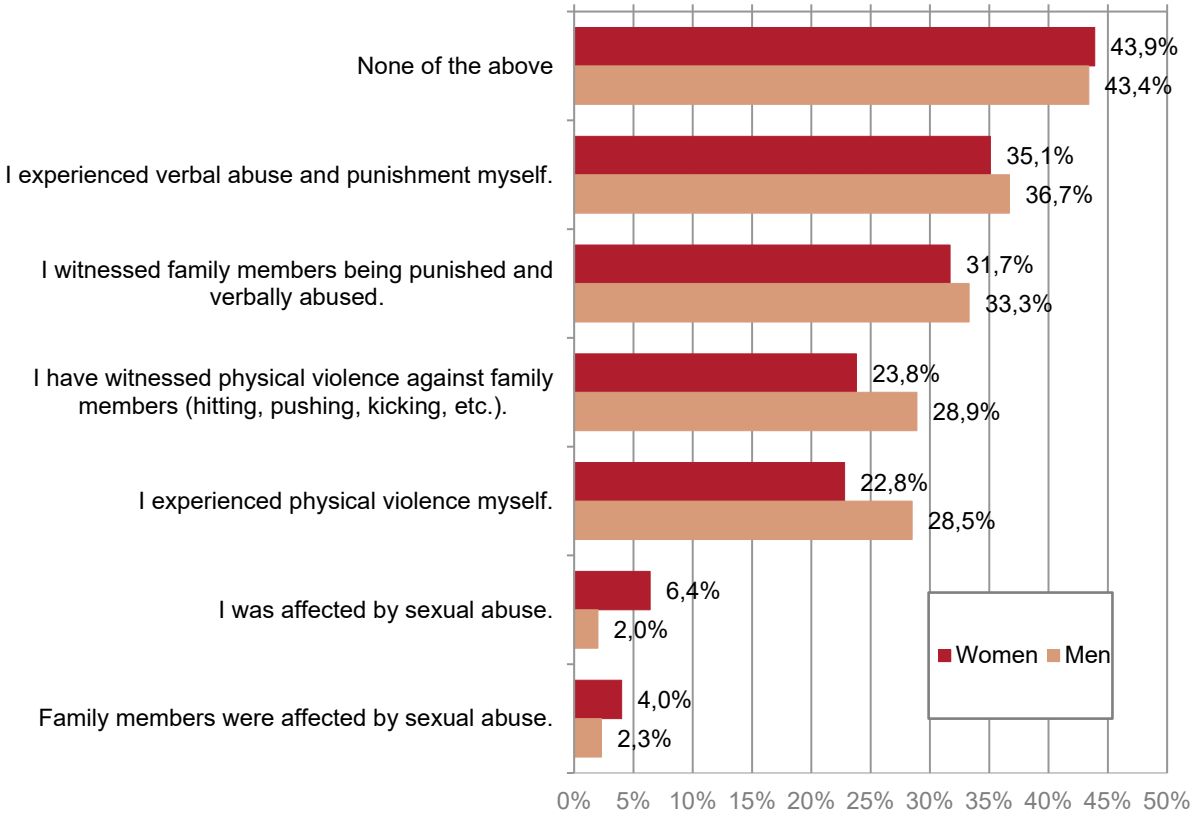
(29 VS, male, 36)

In addition, 4.0% of female and 2.3% of male respondents reported having witnessed this among family members. The interviews also revealed that violence had been witnessed in childhood, although in most cases this form of violence was not identified as an experience of violence by the respondents. The interviewee recounts how, as a child, she witnessed her

grandmother being beaten by her grandfather. At the same time, she herself was sometimes the target of violence or a witness to it:

> *"So the first one (...) was my grandpa,* my *mum*'s *dad. That was the family I was staying with. Yes, um. When he was angry, furious, overwhelmed, tired, he would hit my grandmother, or when he wanted to hit me, my grandmother would sometimes intervene and take the beating for me, so to speak. Both were bad."*
>
> (24 JS, female, 56)

**Figure34: Experiences of violence in childhood (multiple answers possible), by gender**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=2,295, n miss=49, weighted sample.

The results show that violence is mostly perpetrated by fathers or male caregivers, with male respondents reporting this slightly more often (77.5% vs. 71.5%). Around 61% of respondents say that their mother or female caregiver (also) perpetrated violence. There are hardly any differences between the sexes in this regard.

In the qualitative interviews, both fathers or male caregivers and mothers or female caregivers are reported as perpetrators of violence. One respondent describes an example of physical violence experienced by her father as follows:

"*My dad has really freaked out a few times when I* got *on his nerves* (...) *Then it got really bad. He hit me hard and that was it. It was really intense.*"

(24 JS, female, 56)

Another example also shows different forms of violence perpetrated by the father. The interviewee describes how physical violence was linked to psychological stress, with the father destroying property and thus creating an additional threat:

"*He shouted a lot and also used abusive language.* (...) *But it was more like kicking or smashing things. He often broke things, um, our toys, often in situations where my sister and I were present.*"

(54 OP, female, 33)

Violence by mothers or female caregivers was also discussed in the interviews. Several respondents reported physical assaults by their mothers, such as: "(...) *but my mum beat my sister with a wooden spoon*" *(60 JS, male, 60 years old).* However, psychological violence perpetrated by mothers was also experienced by respondents during childhood. The following example illustrates the early experience of degrading and sexualised shaming by the mother:

"*Yes, she literally put me down.* (...) *Yes, and my mum comes in and says what a slut I am and that I'm sleeping with everyone and that I'm probably already pregnant and she has no idea. I was eleven, ten, if that.*"

(62 VS, female, 24)

Another interviewee described extremely demanding and psychologically stressful punishments inflicted by her mother:

"*Yes, but also psychological violence, emotional blackmail and inadequately harsh punishments, such as sitting on the sofa for hours. And my mother kept coming back, shouting at me, asking if I finally knew what I had to say. And I didn't know. I didn't know she wanted an apology from me. And this went on for hours. She came back in and shouted at me. She asked if I finally knew what to say. And I said 'no' because I didn't know.*"

(05 VS, female, 33)

In addition, around 20% of female respondents and around a quarter of male respondents (also) named their siblings as perpetrators. Violence perpetrated by siblings was also described in the interviews. The respondents' accounts show that this includes both physical and psychological violence:

"*Yes, conflicts mainly arose with my sister, where there was a lot, a lot of arguing, where there was intense physical and verbal teasing again and again* (...)."

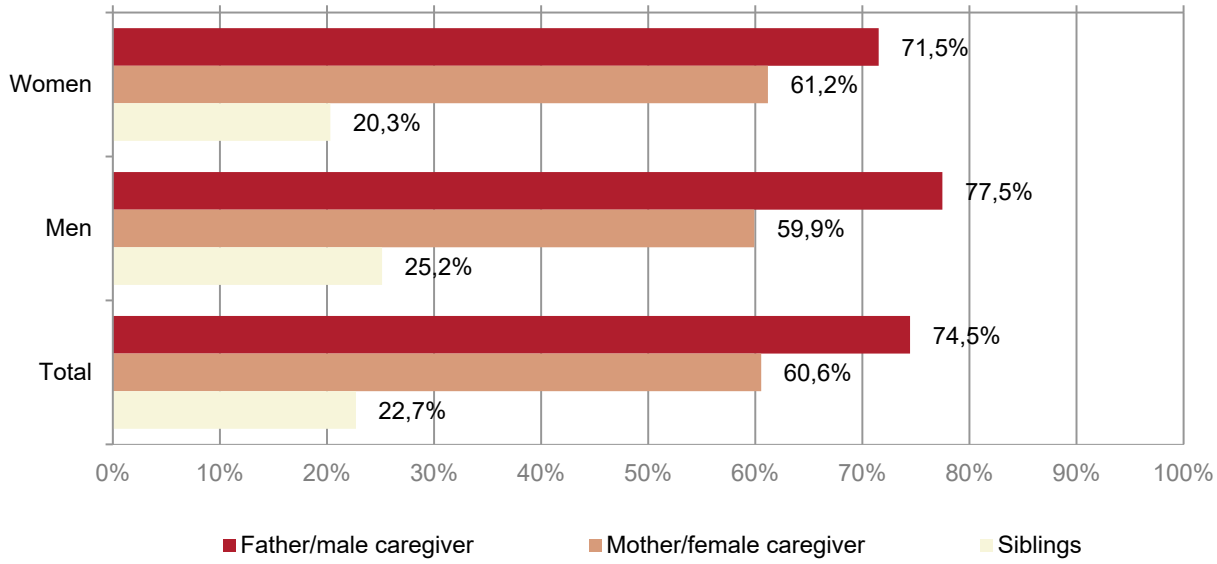
(53 ES, male, 45)

This example illustrates the intertwining of physical altercations with psychological degradation in sibling relationships. Another example shows violence perpetrated by a brother, whereby

the psychological dimension of the experience of violence, the feeling of powerlessness and subordination, is particularly emphasised:

> *"Then, with my brother, it was a bit like that, he was the youngest, and he was sometimes a bit quick-tempered and always got his way.* (...) *I just let things happen to me."*
>
> (26 JS, male, 49)

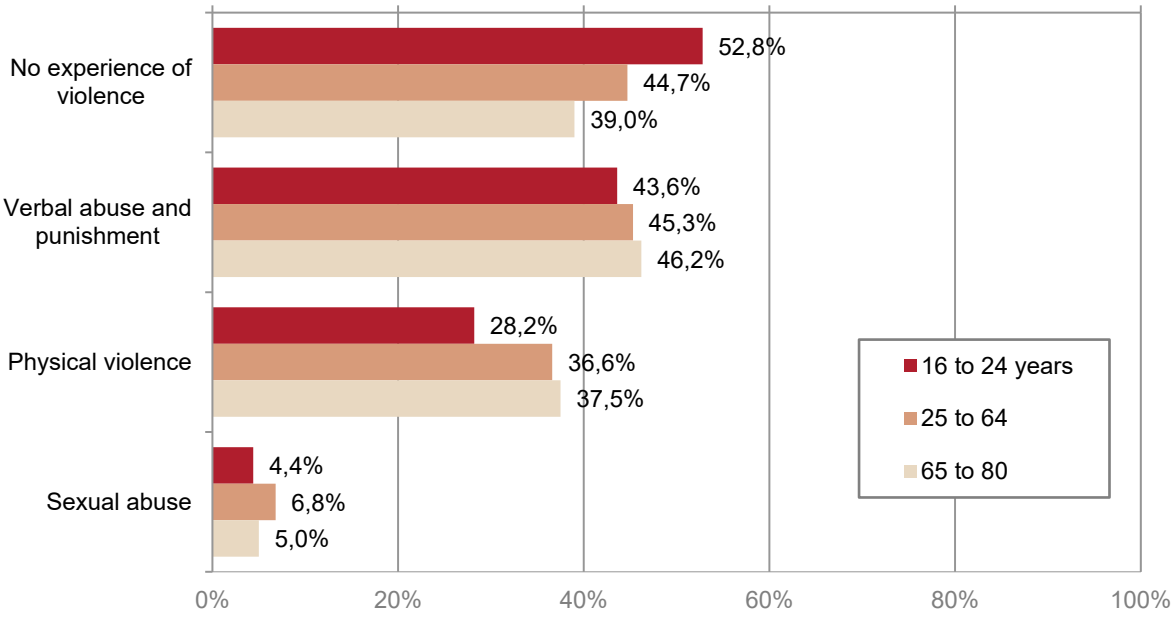
**Figure35: Gender of respondents, by perpetrator of violence in childhood (multiple answers possible)**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,254, n miss=270, weighted sample.

Experiences of violence in childhood decrease with age: slightly less than half (47%) of 24-year-olds reported experiencing violence in childhood. In comparison, this figure rises to 55% among 25- to 64-year-olds and 61% among people aged 65 and over. When broken down by type of violence, experiences of physical violence in particular decrease with age, which can also be explained by a change in social attitudes towards parenting strategies, away from corporal punishment and towards non-violent parenting. This pattern is also evident in the qualitative survey: older interviewees report more frequently and in greater detail about violence experienced in their childhood, especially physical violence. This finding is consistent with existing studies that show a decline in physical violence in the immediate social environment and, above all, in the course of education across generations. For example, the prevalence study "Violence in the family and in the immediate social environment" by Kapella et al. (2011) shows that the reported experience of physical violence increases with the age of the respondents (cf. Kapella et al. 2011). Similar results were also found in a survey conducted by the Gallup Institute (2020), which documented a significant decline in physical punishment in younger cohorts (cf. Gallup 2020).

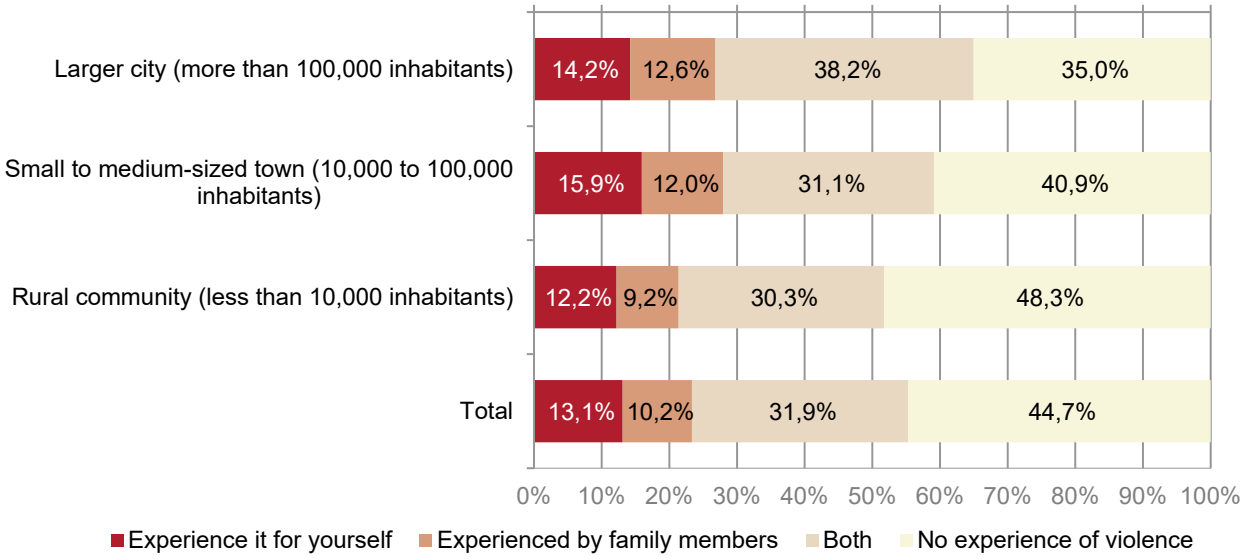
**Figure36: Experiences of violence in childhood (multiple answers possible), by age**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=2,295, n miss=88, weighted sample.

In addition, there are also differences in experiences of violence in childhood depending on the place of residence. People who grew up in a larger city are more likely to have experienced violence in the family (either themselves or witnessed it among family members): Only around 35% of these people say they did not experience or observe violence in childhood, compared with around 48% of people from rural areas.

**Figure37: Region in childhood, by experience of violence in childhood**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=2,295, n miss=111, weighted sample.

In contrast to violence within the family, gender differences emerge in relation to the wider environment (i.e. in the neighbourhood and at school): men* experience violence more frequently than women* in this context. Only 38% of men* reported no experience of violence in

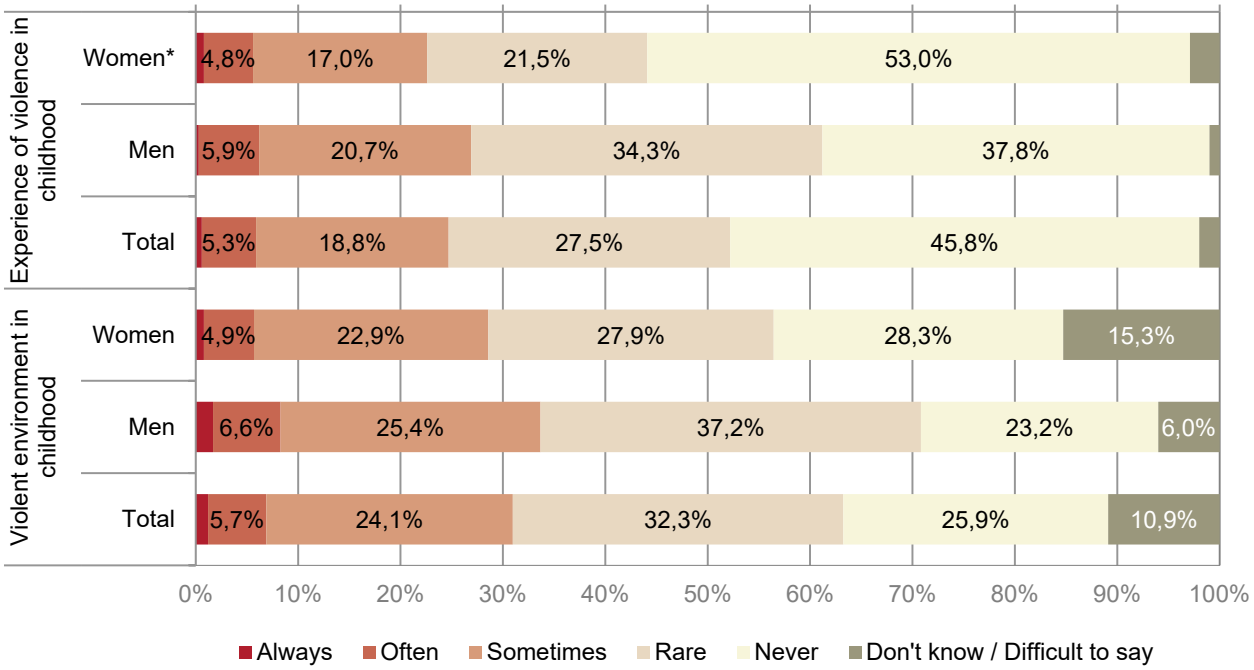
this context, compared with 53% of women*. The gender differences are smaller when it comes to other children and young people in the neighbourhood or school being affected. In this regard, only around 28% of male and 23% of female respondents said they had never experienced this. Although experiences of violence outside the family of origin were not systematically asked about in the qualitative interviews, a few respondents nevertheless brought this up during the interviews. These accounts suggest that school and neighbourhood are central locations for experiences of violence outside the family. One respondent reported both violence against boys in her primary school and her own experiences of violence due to her gender expression at the time in lower secondary school. She described:

> "*My primary school years were relatively hectic because it was a bit of a problem school.* (...) *From what I noticed, there was one of these teachers who was only there for a short time.* (...) *She was very racist and was then kicked out of the school.* (...) *And now, in hindsight, I know for sure that she filmed the boys changing to show how naughty they were.*"
>
> (13 VS, non-binary, 20)

Later in their school career, the same person describes experiences of social exclusion based on gender expression:

> "*In lower secondary school, I was never really bullied*. (...) *I was a bit of an outsider.* (...) *On the one hand because of my queerness.* (...) *I think I cut my hair short for the first time when I was twelve or so, and then there were stupid comments from my class like, 'Hey, are you a lesbian now?*'"
>
> (13 VS, non-binary, 20)

**Figure38: Gender, according to violence in childhood**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=2,295, n miss=53, 54 and 58, weighted sample; values below 3% not shown for better clarity.

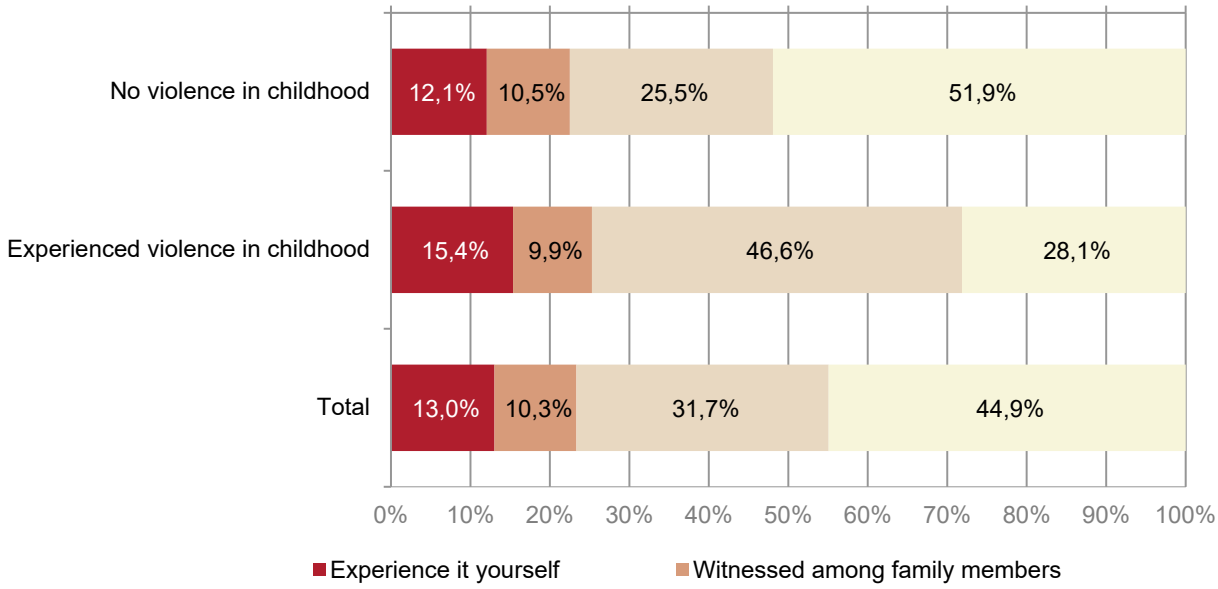
## Conditions for violence and non-violence in childhood: analysis at the onto-, micro-, meso- and macro-levels

The following chapter presents the conditions for violence and non-violence in childhood using the multi-level framework model already introduced in Chapter 3.4.5. The identified factors are systematically assigned to the four levels – ontogenetic, micro, meso and macro. Since the conditions for violence and non-violence in the family of origin largely overlap with those in the current life situation, only the quantitative results on violence (and non-violence) in childhood and supplementary qualitative findings that explicitly relate to the family of origin are presented here.

### Ontological level

The likelihood of experiencing violence in the family increases if violence was perpetrated against others during childhood – i.e. if the person was the perpetrator themselves. Of those who did not perpetrate violence during childhood, more than half report that they did not experience violence either. In contrast, this applies to only 28% of those who did perpetrate violence. The findings presented show a statistical correlation between perpetrating violence in childhood and experiencing violence in the family, without making any statements about the direction or causality of this correlation.

**Figure39: Use of violence in childhood, according to experience of violence in child-hood**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=2,295, n miss=88 and, weighted sample.

The qualitative interview analysis reveals parallels to this quantitative result. One interviewee who grew up in a close-knit community where they themselves experienced violence and continuously witnessed violence among siblings and towards adults recounted:

> *"I went to four different kindergartens in two or three years. Okay, we were very aggressive from an early age. My brother and I went to kindergarten together, in the same group. So yes. Our mum often had to pick us up because we were hitting each other, or the other children, because we just wanted to be left alone."*
>
> (62 VS, female, 24)

Overall, however, the respondents in the qualitative study rarely reported having used violence themselves as children. There could be various reasons for this reluctance. On the one hand, admitting to one's own violent behaviour is often associated with feelings of shame, which requires considerable effort to overcome when recounting the experience. On the other hand, a lack of processing and reflection on one's own childhood behaviour could contribute to these actions not being perceived as relevant or worth reporting. In addition, certain violent acts from childhood could be interpreted retrospectively as insignificant conflicts or socially accepted interactions, so that they do not fall into the category of "violence". Another explanation could be that social desirability comes into play in the interviews, causing interviewees to avoid self-critical or morally burdensome content. In addition, the desire to protect one's own biography or to maintain a consistent, positive self-image may also play a role in the selective presentation of childhood experiences.

Family trauma resulting from war and flight is another key factor contributing to violence. In the interviews, it was reported that the parents' and/or grandparents' generation had

themselves suffered war-related trauma, which had a lasting effect on family socialisation and potentially fostered dynamics conducive to violence. One interviewee described this vividly:

> "*My parents are from a war generation, so they are war children. My father* (...) *was severely traumatised, it has to be said.* (...) *My mother too* (...) *has a war history, both experienced hunger and flight.*"
>
> (22 ES, female, 48)

Another influencing factor concerns gender role expectations within the family – similar to the conditions for violence in the current life situation (see onto-level). On the one hand, gender-related norms are imposed on children. This is evident, among other things, in the following interview excerpt, in which a respondent reported on patriarchal family structures. The father used physical violence when he felt his authority was threatened, especially by his daughter's backtalk or behaviour that conflicted with traditional expectations of the female role.

> "*So I argued* (...) *and when he couldn't defend himself verbally anymore, which was very soon, he slapped me* (...) *It was like, that's not proper for girls* (...) *For example, when I smoked,* (...) *I was told, 'Yes, it's not proper for a girl to smoke.*'"
>
> (03 VS, female, 38)

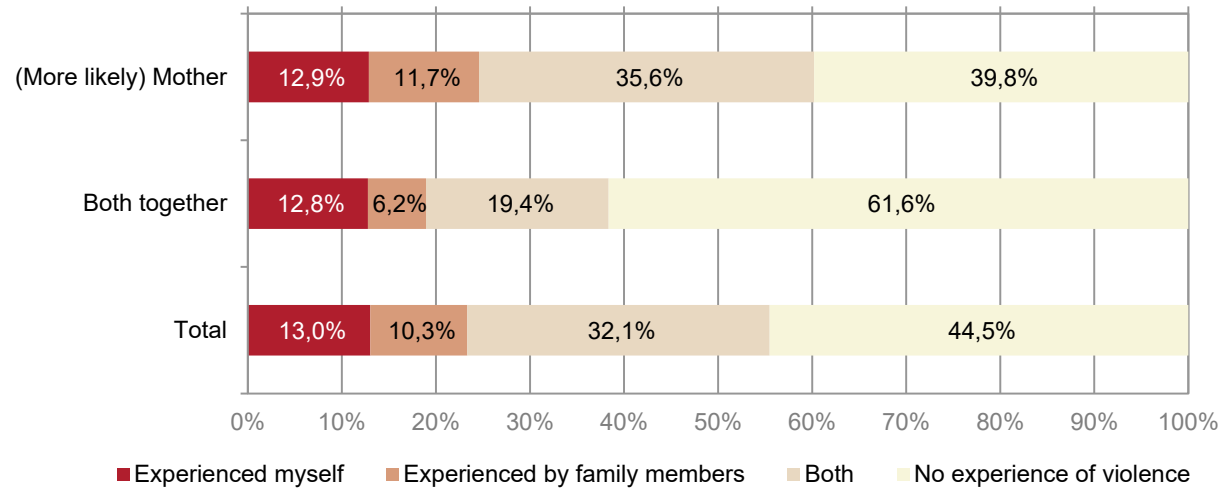
On the other hand, gender role expectations affected not only the children but also the parents. One interviewee reported on the ambivalent demands placed on her father – on the one hand as a traditional breadwinner, on the other as a present and caring parent – which led to him being overwhelmed. This resulted in abrupt mood swings and violent behaviour towards the children.

> "*Um, my dad* (...) *had two very different sides, you have to say. He had three young children and worked incredibly hard as a teacher at a secondary school* (...), *but at the same time, he wanted to be a very present father, which he was. But you could always sense that he was totally overworked* (...) *But the other thing was that he would very quickly, usually for reasons that were completely incomprehensible to us, um, become very, very loud and (...) also physically violent (...). He often broke things, um, our toys – often in situations where my sister and I were present.*"
>
> (54 OP, female, 33)

### Micro level

The division of tasks in the family of origin has a central impact on non-violence in childhood. In traditional role distributions with regard to childcare, specifically when the mother took on the majority of the parenting tasks, more violence was experienced in the family. While almost two-thirds of those with an egalitarian division of labour reported no experience of violence, this was only 40% of those who were mainly or exclusively raised by their mother.

**Figure40: Division of childcare in the family of origin, according to experience of violence in childhood**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=2,295, n miss=168, weighted sample.

The analysis of the interviews shows that the division of unpaid care work in the families of origin is closely linked to experiences of violence in childhood. In many cases, respondents report a traditional division of roles in which mothers or other female caregivers (grandmothers, aunts, neighbours) take primary responsibility for childcare and housework, regardless of whether the mothers perform unpaid care work exclusively or also work part-time or full-time. Such unequal distribution of unpaid care work is often accompanied by experiences of violence. Similar childhood experiences emerge in the majority of interviews. One interviewee describes:

> "*My mum was at home all the time, and my dad was at work.* (...) *Well, he didn't really look after us, he played with us and stuff, but I would say that typical care work was women's work.* (...) *It was mainly my mum who did the ' '. Her mother-in-law lived across the street. We also visited my grandmother from time to time, but she [*the mother] *definitely took on the main responsibility* (...)."
>
> (56 VS, female, 30)

The interviewee experienced violence in the form of "*occasional smacks on the bottom*" and loud shouting, which were perceived as normal and common methods of discipline at the time.

Another frequently reported pattern is the transfer of care and household tasks to children, especially older siblings. Here, too, experiences of violence are clearly evident. One interviewee who experienced systematic and continuous violence in her childhood describes:

> "*If we didn't take care of the household or if we didn't take the little ones out* (...) *and we, as the older siblings, were also responsible for the younger ones and* [had to *take* them to] *kindergarten, go shopping for food, and so on.*"
>
> (62VS, female, 24)

In her case, this burden and responsibility for younger siblings within her family of origin was accompanied by systematic violence.

Some individuals remember that fathers occasionally took on care tasks – mostly at weekends. Such occasional contributions remain positive memories, but do not change the fundamentally unequal distribution of tasks and experience of violence. Experiences of violence were also reported in the following interview.

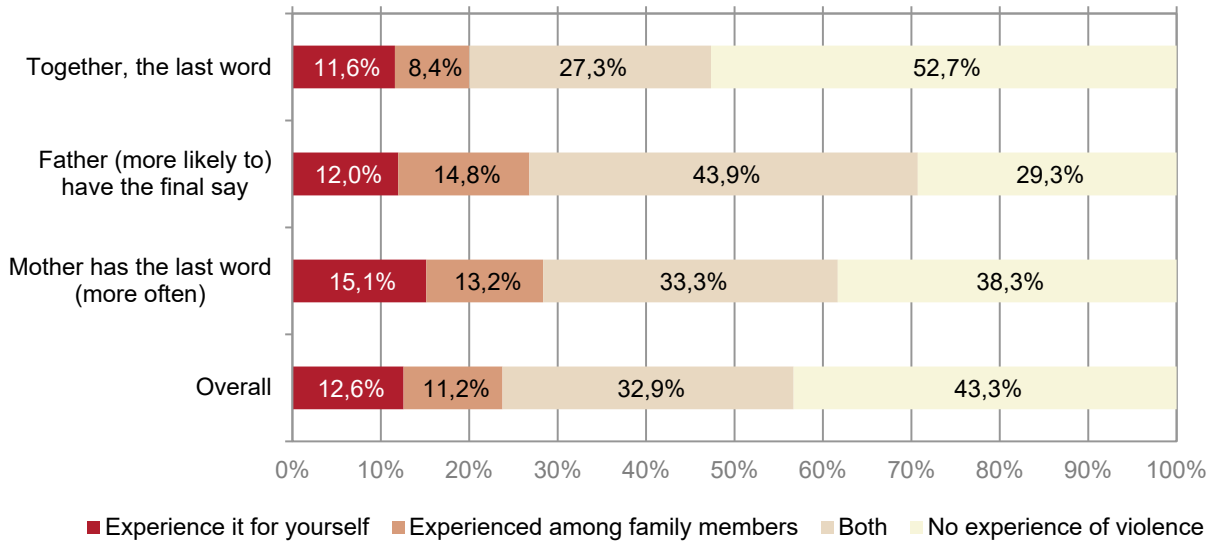
> *"My dad would pick up the vacuum cleaner on weekends. He cooked for us and helped us with our homework. But during the week, it was clearly my mum's job."*
>
> (02 OP, female, 39)

In this case, too, the interviewee described experiences of violence that were exclusively perpetrated by her mother and included physical punishment such as slapping and spanking.

Only a few respondents describe an egalitarian division of care work – in these families, experiences of violence were reported significantly less frequently.

Decision-making in the family of origin also has an influence on experiences of violence in childhood: 53% of respondents whose parents had the final say together stated that they had not experienced violence in childhood. In comparison, this was true for only 29% of respondents whose father had the final say and 38% whose mother did. Egalitarian decision-making processes thus have a violence-preventing effect.

**Figure41: Last say in household matters (e.g. purchases, holidays, etc.) in the family of origin, by experience of violence in childhood**

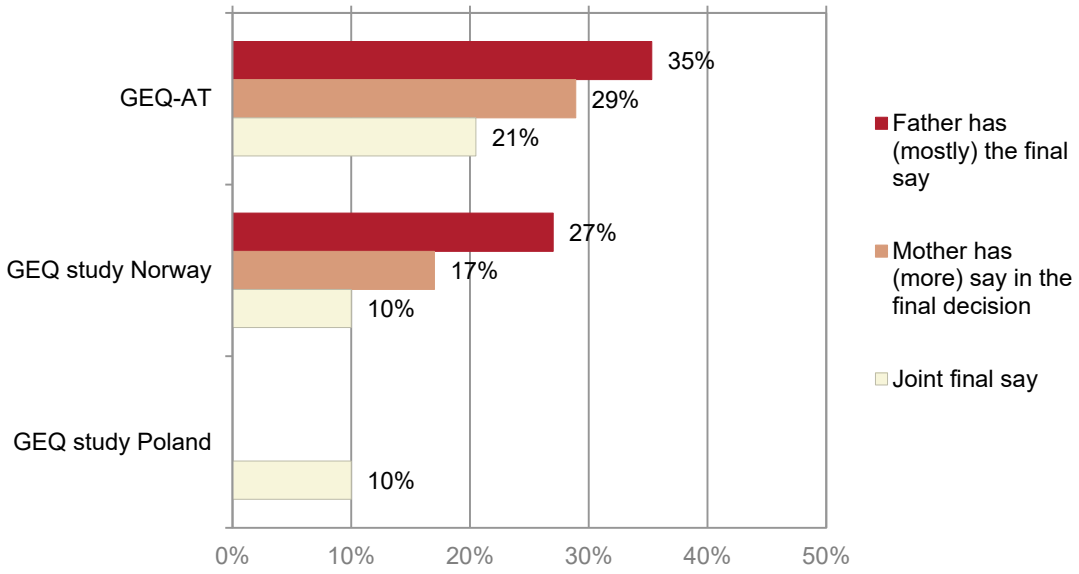



Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=2,295, n miss=178, weighted sample.

These results are also found in the GEQ studies in Norway and Poland. 21% of respondents in Austria and 10% of those in Norway and Poland, where both parents had the final say, stated that they had experienced physical violence in childhood. In comparison, this applies to 35%

of Austrian respondents and 27% of Norwegian respondents where the father had the final say, and to 29% and 17% where it was the mother. In Poland, this also applies to 17% where one of the parents made the decision, although no further distinction was made between father and mother.

**Figure42: Final say and experience of physical violence in childhood**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=2,295, n miss=178, weighted sample; Norwegian GEQ study Holter et al., 2009.

The qualitative interviews also show that egalitarian decision-making is associated with less experience of violence in childhood. In contrast, hierarchical structures in which one parent dominated are more frequently associated with experiences of violence. One interviewee recalls that in her family, her mother made all the decisions:

> "(...) *So the most important thing was to fulfil her wishes. (...) You weren't allowed to decide anything for yourself. I wanted to go to secondary school after finishing school. That was rejected. (...) My mother always decided everything. (...) He [*the father] *can't stand up to her, but he can with my older brothers. (...) But when my mother got involved, it was over and she took control again.*"
>
> (43 JS, female, 35)

These passages illustrate a pronounced power imbalance within the family, characterised by the authoritarian decision-making dominance of the mother. In the same interview, the interviewee describes an emotionally stressful family atmosphere with constant tension:

> "*Yes, well, the atmosphere was oppressive, oppressive, mostly aggressive, oppressive, not harmonious at all. You always had to watch what you said, what you did, how you moved, how you behaved.* (...) *So as a child, I was always tense because I didn't know when the next thing was coming. What was going to happen?* (...)"
>
> (43 JS, female, 35 years old)

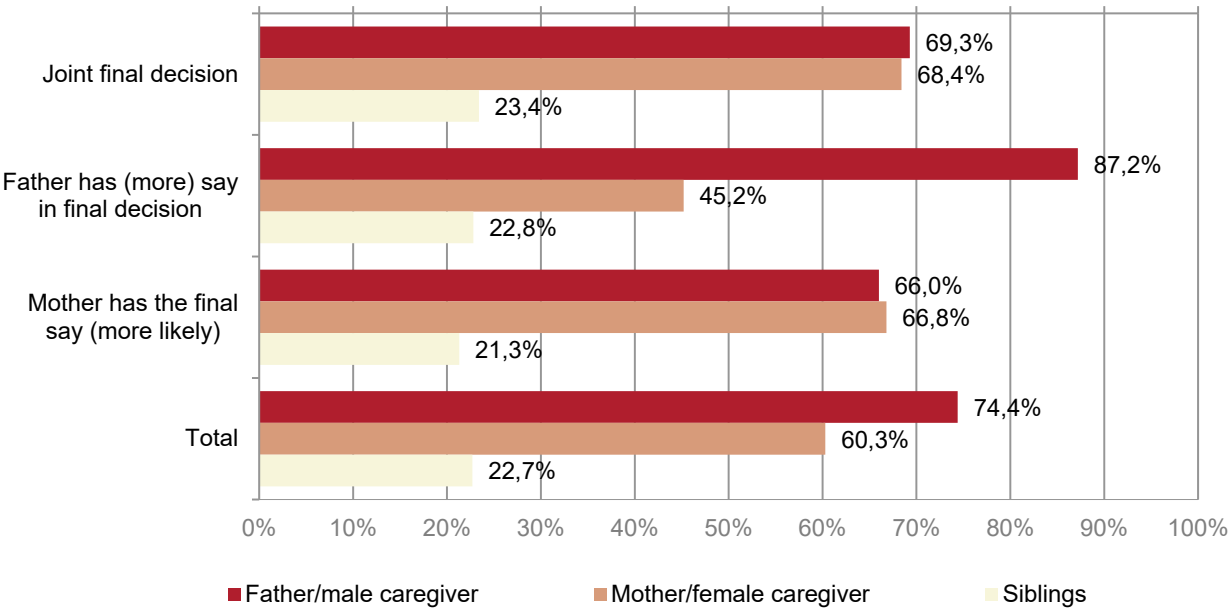
She also describes psychological and occasional physical abuse:

> *"It was more my mother* (...) *who used psychological* [violence] (...) *against her own children, picking on them about how bad they were or what they had done wrong. But you had to put up with it, you weren't allowed to talk back. (...) There weren't many physical slaps, though. If I got [*a slap] *three or four times in all those years,* (...) *I deserved it.*"
>
> (43 JS, female, 35)

In contrast, another respondent describes how challenging situations were dealt with in his family of origin: *"It was briefly mentioned, but not discussed, and that was considered to be the end of it" (36 VS, male, 39).* There was neither escalation nor avoidance behaviour, although no in-depth processing took place. He also emphasises that decision-making processes between both parents were equal: *"(...) because my parents always agreed, at least that's how I felt. (...) So they always seemed to be on the same page" (36 VS, male, 39).*

Furthermore, if the father (tended to) have the final say in childhood, he was also more frequently reported as the perpetrator of violence. If, on the other hand, the mother (tended to) have the final say or decisions were made jointly, there was no difference between whether the violence was perpetrated by the mother or female caregiver or by the father or male caregiver. This applies to both sexes to a similar extent.

**Figure43: Last say in household matters (e.g. purchases, holidays, etc.) in family of origin, by perpetrator of violence in childhood (multiple answers possible)**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,254, n miss=292, weighted sample.

Parenting style also emerges as a significant factor in violence or non-violence in childhood. It is clear that authoritarian parenting methods are more frequently associated with experiences

of violence. One interviewee reflects on her parents' authoritarian attitude, which included physical punishment such as "smacking on the bottom", and describes:

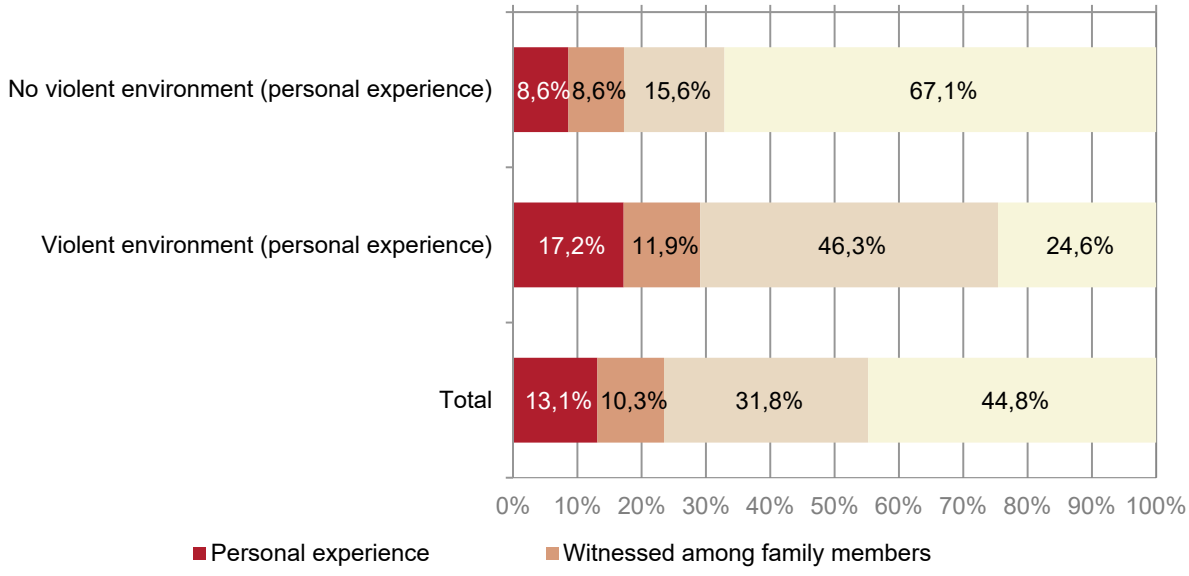
> "*The child is afraid. Yes, that's it, and that's why it works.* (...) *I have control over the child. The child must obey.* (...) *Yes, I see it the same way my dad is with his grandchildren.* (...) *The parents are the authority, the head of the family, they must be obeyed, and the children must be brought up and must follow.*"
>
> (56 VS, female, 30)

In this understanding, obedience is emphasised as a core value, while fear and subordination appear to be legitimate means of upbringing. In contrast, people who experienced a non-violent childhood report upbringing practices based on mutual respect and positive reinforcement. One interviewee describes his experiences as follows: "*Politeness, friendliness. That's the be-all and end-all.* (...) *Punishment. That wasn't really an issue.* (...) *I was motivated*" *(23 VS, male, 51)*. This reveals a parenting style characterised by appreciation and motivation, in which punishment plays no role as a means of education.

### Meso level

Looking at the conditions that favour experiences of violence in childhood, a clear "spiral of violence" emerges: a violent environment in childhood (school or neighbourhood), i.e. experiencing violence there, increases the likelihood of experiences of violence in the family. For example, 17% of people who experienced violence in their environment also experienced violence in the family, while this was only true for 9% of those who did not experience violence in their environment.

**Figure44: Violent environment in childhood, by experience of violence in childhood**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=2,295, n miss=88 and , weighted sample.

Similar indications of the importance of the social environment for experiences of violence in childhood were also identified in the qualitative interviews. The respondents' accounts illustrate that violent contexts outside the immediate social environment, such as in the wider social environment or in educational institutions, can be formative experiences. One interviewee describes how an environment characterised by threats and insecurity made it necessary to develop coping strategies at an early age in order to avoid potential violence:

> "*There were always people around. There were also a lot of men.* (...) *And so as soon as I reached puberty, around the age of eleven or twelve, I learned relatively quickly. Um.* (...) *Hm.* (...) *Not to present myself as too feminine, if I can put it that way.*"
>
> (24 JS, female, 56)

Another interviewee retrospectively reports on a childhood that was not only marked by physical and psychological violence within the family, but also by a violent neighbourhood environment. He emphasises the experiences he was able to spare his own son:

> "*I have to say that* [my son] *didn't experience what I experienced. He didn't see what the speciality line looks like, what knife fights look like, what someone looks like who has a needle in them. He didn't see what pimps are like, drug crime, gang wars, how someone was run over by a car.*"
>
> (60 JS, male, 60)

School was also described by respondents as a violent environment. One interviewee, who experienced psychological violence from his parents and at school during his childhood, describes how deviations from hegemonic norms of masculinity manifested themselves in the form of bullying:

> "*My first experiences of bullying also date back to that time* (...) *school is also connected with that for me. Being teased.* (...) *No physical violence. Never.* (...) *I think people didn't take it as seriously back then as they do today.* (...) *Constant comments. That I was like a girl.*"
>
> (27 ES, male, 36)

It is particularly significant here that the devaluation by peers took the form of attributing femininity, which illustrates the sanctioning of deviations from heteronormative and gender-based expectations.

Another relevant factor influencing the experience and persistence of violence in the family of origin is social pressure. The lower level of anonymity in small social structures increases social control and means that private matters, especially family conflicts or violence, are not disclosed to the outside world for fear of stigmatisation or negative social consequences. Violence is thus considered a "private matter" and remains hidden within the family. One interviewee describes this dynamic as follows:

*"It just happened at home and that contributed a bit to this feeling of isolation somehow.* (...) *And in the countryside, you know more about each other and you're even more careful that nothing that could be bad gets out."*

(21 JS, female, 29)

A protective factor that can contribute to non-violence in childhood is a strong social network for parents. Particularly stable networks within the school community, such as those described at the following Waldorf school, have a relieving and reassuring effect on families. The strong cohesion and mutual support among parents make it possible to cushion everyday stresses and build a social safety net that can prevent family overload and potential violence. One interviewee describes these experiences as follows:

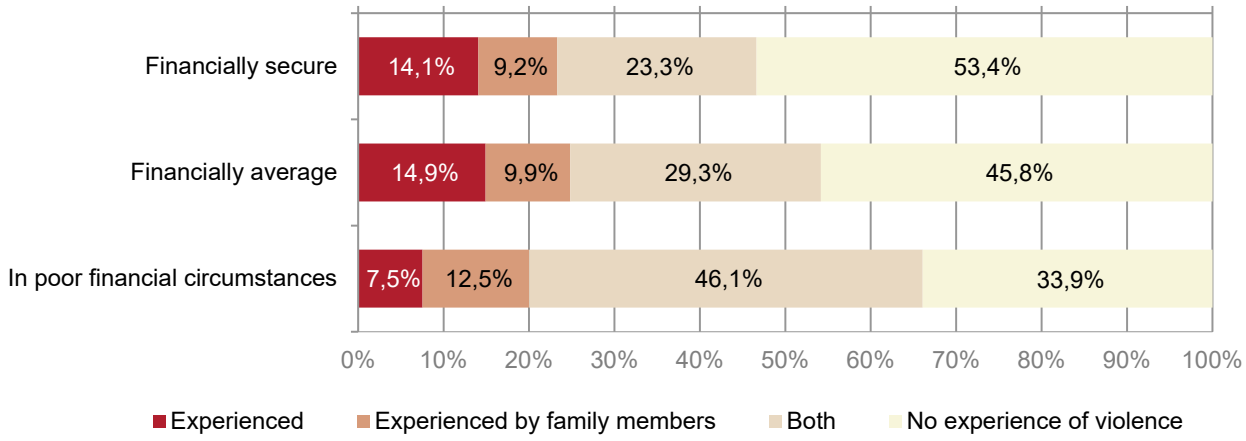
*"But what I do believe is that in these classes, in this school community at this Waldorf school, there was a very strong bond between the parents.* (...) *If she* [my mother] *needed anything,* (...) *five other mothers or fathers would have given me a lift.* (...) *It was really like a network* (...) *everyone looked out for each other* (...). *This community was amazing. It was really, really good."*

(37 VS, female, 39)

### Macro level

The financial situation in the family of origin is also linked to experiences of violence in childhood. A poor economic situation increases the risk of violence, while a good situation reduces it. Approximately one-third of those who were financially disadvantaged reported not having experienced violence in the family. If, on the other hand, the economic situation was "good", this was true for over half of the respondents.

**Figure45: Financial situation in childhood, by experience of violence in childhood**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=2,295, n miss=98, weighted sample.

Financial difficulties were also cited in the qualitative interviews as a relevant factor in experiences of violence in the family of origin. These interviews illustrate that economic resources

have a significant influence on the options available to families and that precarious financial circumstances are associated with limited protection and support mechanisms. One interviewee described her childhood as marked by frequent moves and unstable living conditions. Her father was unable to have his qualifications from his country of origin recognised in Austria and worked in the metal industry, while her mother worked part-time as a hairdresser. The interviewee often stayed with her grandmother, who had an alcohol problem; she experienced violence from both her grandmother and her mother. The economic situation had a significant influence on her mother's decision-making. The interviewee describes:

> *"But I think that for my mother, weighing up whether to expose me to the same danger she was exposed to* [with her violent grandmother] *and spending money on childcare was very challenging for her, and she certainly always blamed herself for that."*
>
> (05 VS, female, 33)

Another factor that can increase the risk of experiencing violence in childhood is queerphobic social norms. In a heteronormative society, such norms have an exclusionary effect and contribute to queer identities being confronted with rejection at an early age. Social sanctions against deviations from the social norm make it difficult for affected young people to develop a positive identity and often lead to internalised conflicts, self-denial and long-term psychological distress. One interviewee reported on her experiences:

> *"And when I wanted to come out to my best friend at the time, it was met with huge rejection.* (...) *It's disgusting and it's gross* (...) *I just suppressed it for a really long time* (...) *it's not a value that came from my parents, but more from the society around me, that it's not okay to like something other than men."*
>
> (21 JS, female, 29)

# 4. Comparison of GEQ results from Austria, Poland and Norway

In the following, key findings from the GEQ-AT study will be compared with those of the international precursor studies in Norway (2007) and Poland (2015). It is important to note that the comparison is limited due to differing questions and evaluation methods. For example, the studies used different indices and correlation models based on them, and figures for individual, specific questions were no longer reported separately. This, in turn, often prevents concrete comparisons of figures. The focus below is therefore on a summary comparison of the results according to key thematic areas. In addition, the different time horizons of the studies and the associated social changes over time must also be taken into account, as well as the overall socio-cultural and socio-economic differences between the three countries. Compared to many other countries, including Poland and Austria, Norway is considered a pioneer in gender equality. Poland and Austria can be classified as gender-conservative countries, although Austria is significantly less so.

## Gender role attitudes

The analysis of gender role attitudes shows broad support for gender equality in all three countries: in the present Austrian GEQ-AT study, around 70% of respondents fully agree with the goal of gender equality, and a further 25% tend to agree. In the previous study from Poland, this was true for 41% and 42% respectively (cf. Krzaklewska et al. 2016). In Norway, too, most respondents support core elements of gender equality policy (cf. Holter et al. 2007). At the same time, however, traditional role patterns continue to exist: one third of Austrian respondents support, either directly or in a modified form, a traditional family model with a clear division of labour according to gender. The Polish study came to a similar conclusion: Although a clear majority of respondents expressed the opinion that gender equality in the family is important, more than half remained convinced of the key role of women in the family and that women are ultimately responsible for the household and family (cf. Krzaklewska et al. 2016).

A central issue here is the economic dimension of gender relations: income differences between women and men are often used as an argument for women doing more unpaid care work. Economic inequality is thus closely linked to gender-asymmetrical division of labour and decision-making power. This is also evident in the previous study from Norway, which found a strong correlation between the distribution of resources within couples and gender-equitable practices, whereby the more the distribution of resources within couples is dominated by men, the less equal couples are in practice (cf. Holter et al. 2007). The attitudes of men* and women* towards equality must therefore be considered in the context of material circumstances (cf. Holter et al. 2007).

In addition, the distribution of care and paid work during the childhood of the respondents in all three countries was predominantly gender-specific. Care work in the respondents' families of origin was performed by a clear majority of women* in Austria (65%). Similar results can be found in Poland, where more than half of the respondents grew up in families with a traditional division of gender roles, in which women* were primarily responsible for the household and childcare, while men* ensured the financial stability of the family (cf. Krzaklewska et al. 2016). A particularly significant finding in this regard is that the more unequally care work was distributed in the family of origin, the more likely respondents are to hold traditional attitudes towards gender roles today. In the Norwegian predecessor study, this result is not quite as pronounced; here, only moderate correlations were found between gender equality in childhood and adolescence and that in later life – the current situation, and in particular the distribution of resources, had a greater influence than earlier socialisation (cf. Holter et al. 2007).

## Division of household and childcare responsibilities in partnerships

The current study from Austria shows that women* still take on the majority of everyday household tasks, while men* tend to focus on activities such as repairs or gardening. The difference in perception is also striking: women* are more likely to say that they do the housework themselves, while men* are less likely to say that these tasks are (mostly) done by their partner. A

similar pattern emerges in reverse with regard to men* and repairs or gardening. Similar results can also be found in Norway, where the distribution of tasks was also gender-segregated and the women* and men* surveyed had different average assessments of exactly how much of the tasks they performed compared to their partners. The average shares reported by the men and women surveyed are higher than the average shares reported by respondents about their partners (Holter et al. 2007).

As found in all three studies, childcare and child-rearing activities continue to be associated with women*: women* are significantly more likely to take care of general childcare tasks such as daily routines (feeding, changing nappies, etc.) and are also more actively involved in activities that involve a certain degree of "necessity", such as staying at home with a sick child (cf. Holter et al. 2007 and Krzaklewska et al. 2016). However, the Norwegian study also noted that these differences are not always so great, especially when it comes to more "voluntary" or "social" activities, such as having intensive conversations with the child or helping with homework (Holter et al. 2007). The current study from Austria also finds a more balanced distribution in playful and leisure activities.

## Division of paid work and economic resources

In all three countries, men and women differ in terms of the average amount of paid work they do; on average, men* work more hours per week than women*. These differences are also reflected in income (Holter et al. 2007 and Krzaklewska et al. 2016), with the gender pay gap being highest in Austria (18.3%), followed by Norway at 12.8% and Poland at 7.8%, which is comparatively low (cf. Eurostat 2023 figures).

The quantitative analysis also shows that women with young children are significantly less likely to be employed than men*. The Norwegian study also reveals gender-specific differences with regard to gainful employment and childcare: while the proportion of those who say that work plays an important role in their lives is the same among fathers with young children as among men* in general, it is lower among mothers with young children than among women* (cf. Holter et al. 2007).

## Decision-making processes

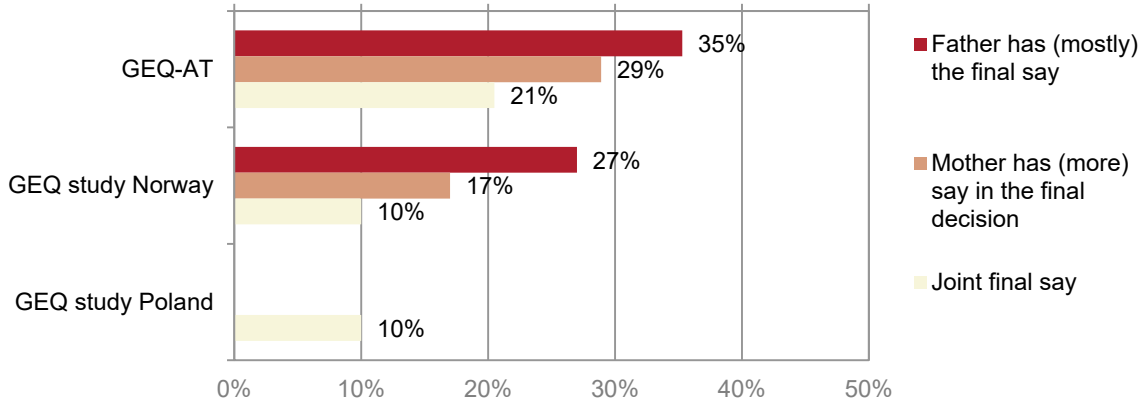
Decision-making processes within families are a key area of gender-related power relations: although 59% of respondents in the Austrian survey stated that decisions in their partnership were made jointly, a clear asymmetry was evident in one third of cases, with women* having the final say more often than men*. In their families of origin, approximately half of the respondents stated that their father and mother made decisions together, slightly more than a quarter stated that the final decision (tended to) lie with their father, and just under a quarter stated that it (tended to) lie with their mother. Compared to their families of origin, there is therefore a noticeable trend towards more equal decision-making. In the Norwegian study, half of the men* and women* reported an equal decision-making culture in their families of origin, while the remaining respondents primarily stated that their mothers made most of the decisions (cf. Holter et al. 2007).

## Experiences of violence

Around a quarter of respondents in the Austrian survey had experienced physical violence themselves during childhood, and around another quarter had observed it (also) among family members. The proportion was similarly high in the Norwegian study: 27% had experienced and/or observed violence in the family (cf. Holter et al. 2007). In Poland, 22% observed and 16% experienced violence (cf. Krzaklewska et al. 2016). In all three studies, violence was predominantly perpetrated by fathers or male caregivers, accounting for 75% of cases in Austria and 67% in Poland (cf. Holter et al. 2007 and Krzaklewska et al. 2016). In addition, there is a generational shift towards a decrease in physical violence in younger cohorts: older people report experiencing violence more frequently, which indicates a change in social norms regarding child rearing. This is also the case in Norway, where the overall figures show that the proportion of children who experience physical punishment and violence at home during their childhood has declined significantly (cf. Holter et al. 2007).

In addition, the distribution of decision-making power in childhood plays a particularly important role when it comes to experiences of violence: the Austrian study shows that egalitarian decision-making processes in childhood are associated with less experience of violence in childhood. These findings are also reflected in the GEQ studies in Norway and Poland. 21% of respondents in Austria and 10% of those in Norway and Poland where both parents had the final say reported experiencing physical violence in childhood. In comparison, this applies to 35% of Austrian respondents and 27% of Norwegian respondents where the father had the final say, and to 29% and 17% where it was the mother. In Poland, this also applies to 17% of respondents where one of the parents made the decision, although no further distinction was made between father and mother.

**Figure 46 : Final say and experience of physical violence in childhood**




Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=2,295, n miss=178, weighted sample; Norwegian GEQ study Holter et al., 2009 and Polish GEQ study Krzaklewska et al. 2016

With regard to their current (or past) relationship, the majority of respondents (86%) had not experienced violence in the last 12 months; in Poland, this was true for 75% (cf. Krzaklewska et al. 2016). When violence was reported, psychological violence was most common in both Austria and Poland (cf. Krzaklewska et al. 2016).

Biographical factors, i.e. experiences of violence in childhood, are of central importance here. In particular, witnessing or experiencing violence in the family of origin increases the risk of experiencing or perpetrating violence in the current relationship (cf. Holter et al. 2007 and

Krzaklewska et al. 2016). The Norwegian predecessor study found that physical punishment or violence in the family not only increases the likelihood of being teased and bullied outside the family, but also found a positive correlation with reports of conflicts at work, violence and conflicts in relationships, and confrontation with violence in the outside world as an adult (cf. Holter et al. 2007). The analyses of the current study also confirm this spiral of violence, in which violent contexts reinforce each other.

Another key finding of the Austrian study is that there is also an increased likelihood of experiencing violence in the family if violence has been used against others – i.e. if the person was the perpetrator themselves. This finding is also evident in the Norwegian study: respondents are victims in one situation, but in another they themselves use violence (cf. Holter et al. 2007).

Although the three countries have different social equality contexts and the GEQ studies in Austria, Norway and Poland used different survey and evaluation designs, Norway and Poland, the correlations between gender equality-oriented couple constellations – in terms of joint decision-making, economic distribution patterns and the distribution of paid and unpaid work – and relationships that are less frequently characterised by experiences of violence are evident in all countries. A possible conclusion is to analyse this important connection in greater detail and to place greater emphasis on the conditions for successful gender-equality-oriented couple relationships and family relationships with a focus on violence prevention in research and practical applications in an international comparison.

# Conclusions and outlook

The results of the GEQ-AT study show with a clarity that leaves little room for interpretation: gender equality in everyday life is much more than a question of fairness or personal lifestyle choices. It has a profound impact on quality of life – and it can be an effective protective factor against violence. This connection is evident not only in the figures from the representative survey but also in the narratives of the respondents. Where paid work and unpaid family work are shared equally between partners, the risk of domestic violence is noticeably lower. Where, on the other hand, one person is significantly more or significantly less involved in paid work or care work, this risk increases – regardless of gender.

The qualitative insights reveal that it is not just the formal distribution of hours that counts. What is crucial are the attitudes and practices that actually enable equality: the natural assumption of care tasks, joint decision-making, and the willingness to delegate and share responsibility. Respondents describe how reliable childcare, flexible working time models, active parental leave planning and sustainable support networks expand their scope of action. Particularly impressive are the accounts of men who see care work not as an exception but as an integral part of their lives – and thus enable partnership models based on equality.

At the same time, it becomes clear how fragile this balance is. Structural conditions can either support or undermine it. A lack of institutional support in the early years of parenthood, inadequate childcare, rigid working time models and economic dependencies restrict the scope for action. Added to this are social role expectations, which are often still strongly rooted in traditional patterns, especially in rural areas. Those who deviate from these norms need not only conviction but also resilience to withstand subtle and overt resistance.

The qualitative results also highlight a delicate mechanism: domestic violence becomes more likely when economic power relations shift – for example, when a woman suddenly earns more than her partner. In some narratives, patterns of *male resovereignisation* (Forster 2006) can be observed: the perceived loss of status or control is compensated for by increased exercise of power in other areas, such as family decision-making. This shows how closely violence and inequality can be intertwined, especially when traditional images of masculinity come under pressure.

Quantitative data also support these findings. In households where the father has the final say in important decisions, the risk of physical violence against children is highest – in Austria even higher than in Norway in a 2009 comparison. Where decisions are made jointly, however, the likelihood of violence decreases significantly. Violence prevention, therefore, does not begin when conflicts escalate, but in the structures, attitudes and negotiation processes of everyday life. It is also striking how difficult it is for some people to identify violence as such. What is described as a "normal argument" or "heated discussion" can be deeply embedded in patterns of violence and inequality. This linguistic and mental invisibility not only makes it difficult to recognise conflicts, but also to deal with them in a targeted manner.

The study makes it clear that personal experiences, partnership dynamics, organisational conditions and social structures are inextricably intertwined. Those who experienced care and paid work being shared as a matter of course in their childhood are more likely to strive for a partnership model – provided that their partner, environment and structures allow for this. Conversely, even high standards of gender equality reach their limits when institutional barriers, a lack of childcare options or a career-focused working environment block change.

Sustainable violence prevention and gender equality in practice therefore require an interlocking approach: strengthening individual attitudes must go hand in hand with the promotion of partnership-based negotiation processes, institutional reforms and social change. Visible and recognised caring masculinities play just as much of a role here as legal frameworks that facilitate the equal distribution of paid work and care work between partners.

One thing is particularly clear from the statistical curves and the voices of those surveyed: gender equality is not a marginal issue, but a central lever for social health. Distributing care work, decision-making powers and economic resources fairly removes one of the most important breeding grounds for violence. Achieving this requires courage, reflection and a willingness to share power – in partnerships, in organisations and in society. At the same time, it becomes clear how many questions remain unanswered: Which dynamics are particularly strong in different social milieus? How do partnership arrangements change over the course of life? How can preventive approaches be designed to be effective in all real-life situations? These questions make it clear that further research is urgently needed – not as an academic end in itself, but as a basis for effective, long-term violence prevention and for gender equality that is noticeable in everyday life.

# Recommendations from gender-based violence prevention work for a welfare-oriented, gender-equal, democratic society

The results of the GEQ-AT study (Gender and violence in the care sector) clearly show that gender inequalities permeate our social, institutional and cultural structures. They shape the distribution of care work, power relations within families, the risk of violence and the economic opportunities available to each gender. Changing these inequalities requires targeted political measures, structural reforms, committed educational work and a clear normative orientation towards a care-oriented, gender-equal, democratic society.

The GEQ-AT study also shows that violence prevention and gender equality are closely linked. A fair distribution of care work, a good early childhood education system, legal frameworks for equal parenting, the reduction of economic dependencies and the visibility of alternative role models are building blocks for a more solidarity-based society.

In Reflecting Groups with experts from the fields of gender equality and violence prevention from all nine Austrian federal states, members of the GEQ-AT project's advisory board and the scientific advisory board, the focus was therefore on the question of what specific recommendations can be derived to strengthen violence prevention and gender equality. This normative perspective, which underlies the recommendations of the GEQ-AT study, is based on the idea of a **just and caring society**. It is not just about gender equality in the statistical sense, but about the fundamental transformation of gender power relations, realities of life and social expectations. A gender-equal society recognises care work as a central social resource, promotes diverse lifestyles and enables all people – regardless of gender, sexual orientation, origin or social status – to live a self-determined, violence-free life. Political action is therefore not merely reactive but actively contributes to creating structures in which care for one another, democratic negotiation and social justice are central. This also means rethinking responsibility – in partnerships, in institutions and at the level of society as a whole.

Against this backdrop, we worked out what concrete steps are necessary to move closer to these goals and which levels of action and actors need to be involved. The following remarks represent the core of the discussions in the various groups:

One lever lies in the design of **support services for parents**. Numerous experts report that these services – whether parental counselling, parental education or family assistance – are still primarily geared towards mothers. For example, parent-child centres offer programmes that implicitly (and in some cases explicitly) address mothers exclusively. Fathers and other genders often feel excluded. This reinforces a perception that care work is primarily associated with femininity. Gender-equitable parenting work must start here – with targeted outreach to fathers and other genders, reflective dialogue spaces for all parents, and formats that take the realities of fathers' lives seriously. For example, when parent cafés or couples' courses are designed in such a way that all genders feel included, space is created for shared responsibility.

But reflection alone is not enough: without **well-developed, flexible and affordable childcare,** the decision on how to divide care often remains an economic dilemma. This is often particularly difficult for single parents or low-income families. Opening hours until noon, long waiting lists and high fees mean that women often remain in part-time, marginal or no employment. In some cases, the household income is then insufficient – a particularly difficult situation for the children and families affected. Furthermore, in many places, nurseries are still not seen as educational institutions, but as "storage facilities" so that "*mothers can go to work for a few hours*". Such structural conditions cement traditional role divisions and hinder equal parenting. At the same time, this squanders a key opportunity to prevent violence. The GEQ-AT study shows that in families with an egalitarian division of labour, the risk of domestic violence is significantly reduced.

Another lever lies in the legal **design of parental leave**[24]. Voluntary measures alone are not enough if structural barriers prevent fathers from participating in unpaid care work. Rather, political measures are needed to support the removal of structural barriers. One example of this is the Scandinavian model of paternity leave with a mandatory portion (**"use it or lose it"**), which has led to a significant increase in fathers' participation in care work in Sweden and Norway, for example. Studies show that fathers who are involved in childcare early on and to a relevant extent remain more active in the long term and are less likely to get into escalating conflicts with their partners or children. Such a reform not only makes sense in terms of family policy but also has a preventive effect against patriarchal power structures that promote violence.

In companies where paternity leave is taken for granted – often encouraged by part-time management and positive role models – concrete changes are evident. International company studies, such as the European MiC – Men in Care Study[25] , show that over the last 20 years, caring masculinities have become an alternative to traditional norms for an increasing number of companies: fatherhood has become more visible, internal company regulations have been introduced or further developed, and initial measures have been implemented. What still seems to be missing is the following: In many companies, the implementation of measures is still very cautious and sketchy, it is not systematic (and not consistently linked to gender equality and human resources strategies), and it seems to focus entirely on fatherhood, while other aspects of care work (such as caring for relatives or colleagues in need of care) remain invisible. This finding, which also applies to Austrian MiC company analyses, was discussed in the context of the GEQ-AT Reflecting Groups with a view to further development towards **"caring companies"**. This includes the further development of structural conditions (flexible working hours

[24] In Austria, fathers can make use of several leave options after the birth of a child. This includes the so-called "Papamonat" (paternity month), i.e. one month of unpaid but job-protected leave immediately following the birth, for which the family-time bonus (Familienzeitbonus) can be claimed as financial compensation. In addition, fathers are entitled to share the longer parental leave (Elternkarenz) with the mother, which can last until the child's second birthday, provided they take at least two months of leave themselves (the so-called "12+2 rule"). See: AMS Österreich: Väterkarenz – https://www.ams.at/arbeitsuchende/topicliste/vaeterkarenz

[25] See: https://www.work-with-perpetrators.eu/men-in-care [15.08.2025].

and locations to enable care work) and communication structures, because employees who care for others must not be excluded. A so-called "culture of care" in companies, which recognises and reflects socially necessary care work as a core value, must become tangible – this is particularly important for men, because they are often the exception when it comes to unpaid care work. And stakeholder networks and supportive management that sets an example are needed.

However, promoting a non-violent society requires more than company-related, labour market policy and family law measures. Violence is not an individual problem, but structurally conditioned. The topic of violence (and talking openly about it) is taboo in our society. In many cases, there is a lack of **knowledge** about what actually constitutes violence – both among those affected and those around them. Advice centres therefore use tools such as the "violence barometer" to show that economic or psychological control in a relationship are also forms of violence. There is a need for **high-profile campaigns** that portray violence in its various forms in a realistic, accessible and descriptive manner. The aim is to make the often invisible or normalised dimensions of violence visible and to show how closely violence is linked to the everyday lives of many people. Only when people recognise that violence also affects their own lives – directly or indirectly – can a deeper social debate and effective change begin.

Another focus is on the importance of education – not only in terms of school curricula, but also in a broader sense with regard to political, social and emotional education. **Gender-sensitive and anti-discriminatory approaches to education** must be addressed more strongly: in kindergartens, schools, extracurricular institutions and in teacher training. "No blame" approaches play a crucial role in supporting violence-preventive educational cultures, as they focus not only on perpetrator-victim dynamics, but also on questioning structural causes such as power imbalances, possessiveness and a lack of conflict culture. This applies in particular to the examination of gender images conveyed by the media, which are increasingly influential in digital spaces. Young people need spaces where they can reflect on problematic narratives and develop new ways of acting. Educational work should not moralise, but rather strengthen relationship skills, the ability to engage in dialogue and the capacity for reflection. In digital media in particular, young people are increasingly encountering extreme gender narratives on platforms such as TikTok and YouTube: "Tradwives" (mostly young women who propagate traditional role models via social media) or violence-prone influencers in the "manosphere" (a loose network of online communities that propagate traditional images of masculinity and gender roles and express misogynistic and anti-feminist views) promote conservative role models and legitimise patriarchal dominance. This shapes ideas about relationships and gender norms. Comprehensive media literacy programmes are needed that not only teach digital tools, but also critically reflect on and question traditional role models in a gender- e way. The experience of experts shows that when alternative gender roles become visible and tangible through social media or in schools, young people can be reached and sensitised to these issues.

In addition to educational institutions, companies and the public sector also have a responsibility. Companies that promote paternity leave, offer gender-equitable part-time models and ensure wage transparency can serve as role models. In the public sector in particular – for

example, in nursing or educational institutions – structural levers can be used to **enhance the status of professions** and overcome stereotypical attributions. The presence of men* in care professions can open up new opportunities for future generations – provided that these professions are economically secure and socially recognised.

For women*, economic independence is crucial to being able to escape abusive or violent relationships. Too often, family income determines whether a woman* has the opportunity to get herself and her children to safety. In many cases**,** there is simply no **network of support services** that is activated before a threat is reported. Assistance for overwhelmed parents, psychosocial support and family counselling must be more accessible, comprehensive and not linked to a deficit logic.

In addition, the Reflecting Groups with experts from victim protection, violence prevention, etc. emphasised the importance of a **socially accepted culture of** separation. When relationships fail, there is often a lack of knowledge about constructive ways of resolving conflicts. Separation phases, for example, carry a high risk of escalation, especially when financial dependencies exist or issues surrounding custody are exploited by biased groups (e.g. radicalised fathers' rights associations). Appropriate training – including for family court judges and authorities – is just as necessary as mediative support, parenting courses on custody competence and support networks. Young parents need realistic and diverse ideas about parenthood and family, including the possibility of separation or changes in family life. Parent education must address these issues so that parents can be well prepared, reflective and resilient in adapting to different life courses.

**Networks** – whether formal or informal – are central to the well-being and relief of families. In non-patriarchal communal living arrangements or solidarity-based care projects, social isolation can be reduced, care work shared, and violence prevented. Such community-building structures are often lacking, especially in rural areas or under precarious conditions. The creation of neighbourhood meeting places, parent cafés or peer offerings such as "dad-and-kid cafés" shows that when men engage in conversation with each other, new opportunities arise – for partnership-based care work and against traditional images of masculinity.

The scientific advisory board of the GEQ-AT study emphatically stressed the socio-political relevance of the study's findings. The empirical findings reveal that the unequal distribution of care work and the associated gender roles not only affect individual life choices, but are also linked to far-reaching social risks, particularly with regard to violence, social inequality and psychosocial stress. This gives rise to key recommendations for research, policy and social practice. The **need for a differentiated scientific examination of the intertwining of gender and violence** was emphasised. The GEQ AT study provides an important basis for this, but many questions remain unanswered: How exactly do role models, power relations and economic dependencies influence the course of violence? What social conditions favour a return to traditional roles, for example in the wake of crises such as the pandemic? And how can the impact of gender- prevention measures be empirically verified? The Advisory Board therefore recommends that these questions be pursued further through in-depth research, in particular

through qualitative studies with marginalised groups, longitudinal analyses and impact research in the field of prevention and education.

At the same time, there are warnings against reducing violence to individual misconduct alone. Rather, violence in private relationships is embedded in social power structures such as gender norms, socio-economic inequalities and migration-related discrimination. Political frameworks are therefore needed that directly address structural causes. These include the **further development of partnership-oriented family policies** that make unpaid care work visible, redistribute it and secure it institutionally.

In addition, the GEQ-AT study has shown how valuable **dialogue formats**, i.e. interdisciplinary exchange between practice, science and politics, can be. This dialogue-based research practice could also be applied more widely in other areas in order to systematically integrate research results into the development of measures and, conversely, to integrate practical knowledge into the research process. The further development of policy measures also requires indicators and monitoring instruments that make the implementation of equality, violence prevention and care justice measurable.

Last but not least, it should be noted that social change is not driven solely by political programmes, but also by cultural negotiation processes. There is a need for **public debate on caring masculinities, care responsibilities, relationship culture and non-violence, beyond blame and moralising**. These debates should be conducted in a differentiated, context-sensitive and participatory manner, particularly involving young people, the perspectives of those affected and intersectional positions. Campaigns and public relations work are crucial in this regard: care work must be made visible. Positive role models who convey new role models can provide effective impetus

# Bibliography


Acker, Joan (1991): Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations. In: Lorber J./ Farrell, S.A. (1991): The Social Construction of Gender. London: Sage (162-179).

Acker, Joan (1992): Gendering Organizational Theory. In: Mills A.J./ Tancred P. (1992). Gendering Organizational Analysis. London: Sage (248-260).

Acker, Joan (2006): Class Questions Feminist Answers. The Gender Lens Series. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.

Arao, Brian/ & Clemens, Kristi (2013): From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces. In Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections From Social Justice Educators, 135–151.

Bayerisches Staatsministerium für Familie, Arbeit und Soziales (o.D.): Gewalt LOSwerden. URL: https://bayern-gegen-gewalt.de/gewalt-infos-und-einblicke/was-ist-gewalt/ [15.08.2025].

Bergmann, Nadja, Reichert, Helga, Sorger, Claudia, Amon-Konrath, Cornelia, Wagner-Steinrigl, Sabine (2012): Eltern am Arbeitsplatz. Zwischen Vereinbarkeit und Diskriminierung. Wien.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1987): Die feinen Unterschiede. Kritik der gesellschaftlichen Urteilskraft. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1997): Über die symbolische Macht. Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften, 8(4), 556–564. https://doi.org/10.25365/oezg-1997-8-4-6 [15.08.2025].

Bourdieu, Pierre (2005): Die männliche Herrschaft. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp.

Brandstetter, Manuela (2009): Gewalt im sozialen Nahraum – Begriffliche Bestimmungen. In: Gewalt im sozialen Nahraum. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. URL: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-91958-4_2 [15.08.2025].

Bundesministerium für Inneres (2022): Kriminalitätsbericht 2022. Statistik und Analyse. URL: https://www.bmi.gv.at/508/files/SIB_2022/Kriminalitaetsbericht_Statistik_und_Analyse_nBF_20240606.pdf [15.08.2025].

Bundesministerium für Inneres (2025): Polizeiliche Kriminalstatistik 2024 - Entwicklung der Kriminalität in Österreich. URL: https://www.bundeskriminalamt.at/501/files/PKS-24-web3_bf_20250422.pdf [15.08.2025].

Bundesministerium für soziale Sicherheit und Generationen (2001): Gewalt in der Familie. Gewaltbericht 2001. Von der Enttabuisierung zur Professionalisierung. URL: https://www.oif.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/p_oif/andere_Publikationen/Kurzbericht_Gewalt_2001.pdf [15.08.2025].

Butler, Judith (1990): Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. New York: Routledge.

Connell, Raewayn. W. (1995): Masculinities. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Connell, Raewayn W. & Messerschmidt, James W. (2005): Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. Gender & Society, 19(6), 829-859.

Connell, Raewyn W. (2015): Der gemachte Mann. Konstruktion und Krise von Männlichkeiten. 5. Aufl., Opladen: Barbara Budrich.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé (1989): Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiskrimination Doctrine. In: The University of Chicago Legal Forum, S. 139-167.

Daminger, Allison (2019): The Cognitive Dimension of Household Labor. In: American Sociological Review, 84(4), 609-633.

Deutsch, Francine M. (2007): Undoing Gender. Gender & Society, 21(1), 106–127. URL: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0891243206293577 [14.08.2025].

EIGE (o.D.): Forms of violence. URL: https://eige.europa.eu/gender-based-violence/what-is-gender-based-violence/forms-of-violence [14.08.2025].

Elliott, Karla (2016): Caring Masculinities: Theorizing an Emerging Concept. In: Men and Masculinities, 19(3), 240-259.

e.Medpedia (o.D.): Prävention und Intervention bei Vernachlässigung und Deprivation. URL: https://www.springermedizin.de/emedpedia/paediatrie/praevention-und-intervention-bei-vernachlaessigung-und-deprivation?epediaDoi=10.1007%2F978-3-642-54671-6_281 [15.08.2025].

Federici, Silvia (2012): Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle. Oakland: PM Press.

Filler, Ewald (2019): Die Rechte von Kindern und Jugendlichen. Bundeskanzleramt Wien. URL: https://www.bundeskanzleramt.gv.at/dam/jcr:a3743079-f149-4c0b-8862-ffd2e1fdad5c/Rechte-Kinder-Jugendliche.pdf [15.08.2025].

Forster, Edgar (2006). Männliche Resouveränisierungen. In: Feministische Studien, 24(2), S. 193-207.

FRA (2020): A long way to go for LGBTI equality. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. URL: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-lgbti-equality-1_en.pdf [14.08.2025].

Fraser, Nancy (1994): After the Family Wage: A Postindustrial Thought Experiment. In: Justice Interruptus. New York: Routledge.

Fraser, Nancy (2016): Contradictions of Capital and Care. In: New Left Review, 100, 99-117.

Fraser, Nancy (2003): Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics. In: Fraser & Honneth: Umverteilung oder Anerkennung? Frankfurt a.d. Main: Suhrkamp.

Frauen helfen Frauen (o.D.): Über Gewalt. URL: https://www.frauen-helfen-frauen-ffb.de/ueber-gewalt/ [15.08.2025].

Freie Universität Berlin (2022): Glossar geschlechtliche Vielfalt. https://www.fu-berlin.de/sites/diversity/_media/FU-Glossar-geschlechtliche-Vielfalt-Stand-220623.pdf [28.08.2025]

Gallup Institut (2020): Gewalt an Kindern. URL: https://www.die-moewe.at/sites/default/files/23335_Pr%C3%A4s_die%20m%C3%B6we_Gewalt%20an%20Kindern.pdf [15.08.2025].

Gärtner, Marc & Scambor, Elli (2020): Caring Masculinities. Über Männlichkeiten und Sorgearbeit. In: Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte, Beilage zur Wochenzeitung „Das Parlament", 70. Jahrgang, 45/2020, S. 22-27. URL: https://www.bpb.de/apuz/care-arbeit-2020/317852/caring-masculinities-ueber-maennlichkeiten-und-sorgearbeit [13.08.2025].

Geserick, Christine, Hornung, Helena, Hübel, Teresa, Kaindl, Markus, Wernhart, Georg (2023): Ar-beitsteilung in Partnerschaften. https://www.oif.ac.at/fileadmin/user_upload/p_oif/Forschungsberichte/FB_50_-_Arbeitsteilung.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Gewaltinfo (2025): Definition Gewalt. URL: https://www.gewaltinfo.at/fachwissen/definition-gewalt.html [15.08.2025].

Gildemeister, Regine (2013): Doing Gender. In: Lenz, Ilse (Hrsg.): Gender-Handbuch. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

Goldberg, Abbie. E., & Allen, Katherine R. (2020): Qualitative Research on LGBTQ-Parent Families. In: Goldberg, A.E., Allen, K.R. (eds) LGBTQ-Parent Families. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-35610-1_28 [15.08.2025].

Hagemann-White, Carol (2008): Vorwort. In Gewalt im Geschlechterverhältnis. Erkenntnisse und Konsequenzen für Politik, Wissenschaft und soziale Praxis, Forschungsnetz Gewalt im Geschlechterverhältnis [GiG-net] (ed.), 7 – 10. Opladen: Verlag Barbara Budrich.

Hagemann-White, Carol/ Kelly, Liz/ Römkens, René (2010): Feasibility study to assess the possibilities, opportunities and needs to standardise national legislation on violence against women, violence against children and sexual orientation violence. Brussels: European Union.

Hanlon, Niall (2012): Masculinities, Care and Equality: Identity and Nurture in Men's Lives, London: palgrave macmillan.

Hart, Patrick (2015): LGBTI Gewalterfahrungen Umfrage. Eine Studie zu Hassverbrechen in Österreich. Graz.https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/lgbti_gewalterfahrungen.pdf [15.08.2025].

Hirschauer, Stefan (2014): Un/Doing Differences: Die Kontingenz sozialer Zugehörigkeiten. In: Zeitschrift für Soziologie, 43(3), 170–191.

Hochschild, Arlie R. (1989): The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home. New York: Viking.

Holter, Øystein G. und Aarseth, Helene (1993): Menns livssammenheng. Oslo: Ad Notam Gyldendal.

Holter, Øystein G./ Riesenfeld, Vera/ Scambor, Elli (2005): 'We don't have anything like that here!' - Organisations, Men and Gender Equality. In: R. Puchert , M. Gärtner & S. Höyng (eds.), Work Changes Gender. Men and Equality in the Transition of Labour Forms (pp. 73 - 104). Opladen: Barbara Budrich Publishers.

Holter, Øystein. G./ Svare, Helge / Egeland, Cathrine (2009): Gender Equality and Quality of Life – A Nordic Perspective. Oslo: NIKK.

Holter, Øystein G. & Krzaklewska, Ewa (2017): Gender Equality and Quality of Life: European Blueprint Information and Instructions. Jagiellonian University in Kraków and University of Oslo.

Illouz, Eva (2023): Warum Liebe weh tut. Berlin: suhrkamp.

Kapella, Olaf/ Baierl, Andreas/ Rille-Pfeiffer, Christiane/ Geserick, Christine/ Schmidt, Eva-Maria (2011): Gewalt in der Familie und im nahen sozialen Umfeld: Österreichische Prävalenzstudie zur Gewalt an Frauen und Männern. Wien: Österreichisches Institut für Familienforschung an der Universität Wien. URL: https://services.phaidra.univie.ac.at/api/object/o:1162297/download [15.08.2025].

Kelly, Joan B./ Johnson, Michael (2008): Differentiation Among Types of Intimate Partner Violence: Research Update and Implications for Interventions. Family Court Review (46/3): 476-499.

Klinger, Cornelia (2010): Gender, soziale Ungleichheit und Differenz. In: Becker, R. (Hrsg.): Handbuch Bildungs- und Ungleichheitsforschung. Wiesbaden: Springer.

Krzaklewska Ewa/ Slany, Krystyna/ Ciaputa, Ewelina/ Kowalska, Beata/ Ratecka Anna/ Tobiasz-Adamczyk, Beata/ Warat, Marta/ Woźniak, Barbara (2016): Gender Equality and Quality of Life in Poland. A Survey Research Report. Krakow: Jagiellonian University. https://geq.socjologia.uj.edu.pl/documents/32447484/35419405/GEQ+ENG.pdf/2a8c82c8-aa81-4d1d-9387-5ca07e63f0e1 [28.08.2025]

Lutz, Helma/ Herrera Vivar, Maria Teresa H./ Supik, Linda (Hrsg.) (2013): Fokus Intersektionalität: Bewegungen und Verortungen eines vielschichtigen Konzeptes (2., überarb. Aufl.). Wiesbaden: Springer VS. URL: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-19550-6 [14.08.2025].

Mayring, Peter (2010): Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse. Grundlagen und Techniken. Weinheim und Basel: Beltz Juventa.

Mayrhuber, Christine/ Bergmann, Nadja/ Hausegger, Trude/ Leitner, Andrea/ Enengl, Flavia/ Hajji, Assma/ Iby, Anna/ Radlherr, Julia (2024): Gleichstellung in Österreich Zahlen, Daten und Fakten. Wien: Studie im Auftrag des Bundeskanzleramtes.

Menzel-Holzwarth, Brigitte (2016): (K)ein sicherer Ort. Sexuelle Gewalt an Kindern. URL: https://selbstlaut.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/2016_Brosch%C3%BCre_KSO_barrierefrei-Kopie.pdf [15.08.2025].

Messner, Michael (2000): Politics of Masculinities: Men in Movements. Thousand Oaks: Altamira Press.

Olson, David (2000). Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems. *Journal of Family Therapy*, 22, 144-167.

Riesenfelder, Andreas/ Danzer, Lisa (2024): Wiedereinstiegsmonitoring 2024. Kontinuitäten, Trendbrüche und Nachwirkungen der Covid-Krise. Ein Überblick über die Ergebnisse der sechsten Fassung des Wiedereinstiegsmonitorings zu den Kohorten 2006 bis 2021 in Österreich und in den Bundesländern. Wien: Im Auftrag der Arbeiterkammer Wien.

Scambor, Christian/ Scambor, Elli (2017): Gender Based Violence and the Role of Men (Nasilje na podlagi spola in vloga moških). In: Časopis za kritiko znanosti, Let. XLV, 2017, Številka 267. S. 115-127.

Scambor, Elli/ Wojnicka, Katarzyna/ Bergmann, Nadja (Hg.) (2013): Study on the Role of Men in Gender Equality. Prepared for the European Commission, written by Sophia Belghiti-Mahut, Nadja Bergmann, Marc Gärtner, Jeff Hearn, Øystein Gullvåg Holter, Majda Hrženjak, Ralf Puchert, Christian Scambor, Elli Scambor, Hartwig Schuck, Victor Seidler, Alan White & Katarzyna Wojnicka. URL: https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f6f90d59-ac4f-442f-be9b-32c3bd36eaf1/language-en [13.08.2025].

Scambor, Elli/ Bergmann, Nadja/ Wojnicka, Katarzyna/ Belghiti-Mahut, Sophia/ Hearn, Jeff/ Holter, Øystein G./ Gärtner, Marc/ Hrženjak, Majda/ Scambor, Christian/ White, Alan (2014): Men and Gender Equality. European Insights. In: Men and Masculinities, 17(5), 552-577.

Scambor, Elli/ Holtermann, Daniel (2023): Ist Sorgearbeit nichts für Männer? In: Soziale Arbeit Kontrovers 31. Freiburg: Lambertus-Verlag. URL: https://www.deutscher-verein.de/de/buchshop-des-dv-reihe-soziale-arbeit-kontrovers-1541.html?PAGE=artikel_detail&artikel_id=275 [14.08.2025].

Stadt Wien (o.D.): Formen der Gewalt gegen Frauen. URL: https://www.wien.gv.at/menschen/frauen/stichwort/gewalt/formen.html [15.08.2025].

Statistik Austria (2022): Geschlechtsspezifische Gewalt gegen Frauen in Österreich. Prävalenzstudie beauftragt durch Eurostat und das Bundeskanzleramt. Wien.

Statistik Austria (2023a): Arbeitsmarktstatistiken 2022. Ergebnisse der Mikrozensus-Arbeitskräfteerhebung und der Offene-Stellen-Erhebung. URL: https://www.statistik.at/services/tools/services/publikationen/detail/1577 [13.08.2025].

Statistik Austria (2023b): Zeitverwendung 2021/22. Ergebnisse der Zeitverwendungserhebung. Wien.

Statistik Austria (2024): Abgestimmte Erwerbsstatistik 2022. URL: https://www.statistik.at/fileadmin/user_upload/AEST_2022.pdf [13.08.2025].

Statistik Austria (2025): Arbeitsmarktstatistiken 2024. Ergebnisse der Mikrozensus-Arbeitskräfteerhebung und der Offene-Stellen-Erhebung. Wien: Publikation der Statistik Austria.

Strauss, Anselm L./ Corbin, Juliet M. (1996): Grounded Theory. Grundlagen qualitativer Sozialforschung. Weinheim: Beltz, Psychologie-Verlags-Union.

Tronto, Joan C. (1993): Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care. New York: Routledge.

Tronto, Joan C. (2013): Caring Democracy: Markets, Equality, and Justice. New York, London: New York University Press.

Villa, Paula-Irene (2012): Gender/Queer Studies. Eine Einführung. Wiesbaden: Springer VS.

Warat, Marta/ Krzaklewska, Ewa/ Ratecka, Anna/ Slany, Krystyna (2017): Gender Equality and Quality of Life. Perspectives from Poland and Norway. Frankfurt am Main u.a.: Peter Lang Edition.

West, Candace & Zimmerman, Don H. (1987). Doing Gender. In: Gender & Society, 1(2), 125–151. URL: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0891243287001002002 [14.08.2025].

WHO (2003): Weltbericht Gewalt und Gesundheit. URL: http://www.gesunde-maenner.ch/data/data_160.pdf [15.08.2025].

Wigger, Annegret/ Weber, Matthias/ Sommer, Antje (2012): Ein Pilotprojekt zur Ausbildung Reflexiver Professionalität. In: Becker-Lenz, Roland/Busse, Stefan/Ehlert, Gudrun/Muller-Hermann, Silke (Hrsg.): Professionalität Sozialer Arbeit und Hochschule. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, S. 251-269.

Winker, Gabriele (2015): Care Revolution. Schritte in eine solidarische Gesellschaft. Bielefeld: transcript.

# List of figures

# List of tables

# Table appendix

**Table 7: Attitudes towards gender roles, by gender**

| | | Male | Female | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **No woman should be financially dependent on a man.** | **Strongly agree** | 61.8 | 77.8 | 70.3 |
| | **Somewhat agree** | 29.7 | 13.9 | 21 |
| | **Disagree somewhat** | 4.4 | 3.2 | 3 |
| | **Strongly disagree** | 4.1 | 5.1 | 4.6 |
| | **Total** | 100 | 100.0 | 100.0 |
| **Gender equality is an important value for society.** | **Strongly agree** | 64.1 | 75.6 | 70.2 |
| | **Somewhat agree** | 29.3 | 18.7 | 23.7 |
| | **Disagree somewhat** | 2.9 | 3.9 | 3 |
| | **Strongly disagree** | 3.7 | 1.8 | 2.7 |
| | **Total** | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| **A man must be able to assert himself against his wife.** | **Strongly agree** | 2.6 | 1 | 2 |
| | **Somewhat agree** | 12.9 | 6.4 | 9.5 |
| | **Somewhat disagree** | 33.8 | 20.8 | 26.9 |
| | **Strongly disagree** | 50.6 | 71.1 | 61.5 |
| | **Total** | 10 | 100 | 100 |
| **It is the man's responsibility to provide financially for his family.** | **Strongly agree** | 7.5 | 3 | 5 |
| | **Somewhat agree** | 26.9 | 15.8 | 21 |
| | **Somewhat disagree** | 31.8 | 31.7 | 31.8 |
| | **Strongly disagree** | 33.8 | 49.4 | 42.0 |
| | **Total** | 10 | 100 | 100 |
| **Women are too strongly influenced by their emotions when making important decisions.** | **Strongly agree** | 6.5 | 6 | 6 |
| | **Somewhat agree** | 36.1 | 33.2 | 34.5 |
| | **Disagree** | 35.4 | 30.6 | 32.8 |
| | **Strongly disagree** | 22.1 | 29.5 | 26.1 |
| | **Total** | 10 | 100 | 100 |
| **A mother with young children should not go out to work.** | **Strongly agree** | 16.2 | 11 | 13 |
| | **Somewhat agree** | 33.5 | 23.6 | 28.3 |
| | **Disagree** | 27.7 | 29.8 | 28 |
| | **Strongly disagree** | 22.6 | 34.8 | 29 |
| | **Total** | 100 | 100 | 100 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **There are only two genders – men and women.** | **Strongly agree** | 29.3 | 20.9 | 24.9 |
| | **Somewhat agree** | 25.0 | 19.6 | 22 |
| | **Disagree** | 18.7 | 17.2 | 18 |
| | **Strongly disagree** | 26.9 | 42.3 | 35 |
| | **Total** | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| **Children should learn as early as possible that homosexuality is normal.** | **Strongly agree** | 37.6 | 54.5 | 46 |
| | **Somewhat agree** | 29.3 | 28.8 | 29.1 |
| | **Disagree somewhat** | 18.9 | 9.7 | 1 |
| | **Strongly disagree** | 14.2 | 6.9 | 10.4 |
| | **Total** | 10 | 100 | 100 |
| **You can choose which gender you identify with.** | **Strongly agree** | 29 | 40.7 | 35 |
| | **Somewhat agree** | 33.0 | 28.7 | 30.7 |
| | **Disagree somewhat** | 15.7 | 14.8 | 15.3 |
| | **Strongly disagree** | 21.9 | 15.8 | 18.7 |
| | **Total** | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=2,295, n missing between 89 and 206, weighted sample.

## Table8: Index: 'Traditional role model', by gender

| | **Male** | **Female** | **Total** |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Proportion** | **Percentage** | **Percentage** |
| **(Somewhat) Disapproval** | 56. | 75.8 | 66.8 |
| **(Rather) approval** | 43 | 24.2 | 33.2 |
| **Total** | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=2,295, n miss=110, weighted sample.

## Table9: Index: 'Traditional role model', by age

| | **Under 30** | **30 to 45** | **46 to 65** | **Over 65** | **Total** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Percentage** | **Percentage** | **Percentage** | **Proportion** | **Per-cent-age** |
| **(Rather) rejection** | 66.1 | 72.7 | 67.2 | 49.0 | 67.5 |
| **(Somewhat) agree** | 33.9 | 27.3 | 32.8 | 51.0 | 32.5 |
| **Total** | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=2,295, n miss=154, weighted sample.

## Table10: Index: 'Traditional role model', by place of residence

| | Larger city (over 100,000 inhabitants) | Small to medium-sized town (10,000 to 100,000 inhabitants) | Rural community (less than 10,000 inhabitants) | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Proportion | Proportion | Proportion | Pro-por-tion |
| (Somewhat) Disapproval | 78.3 | 69.1 | 63.0 | 67.6 |
| (Rather) approval | 21.7 | 30.9 | 37 | 32.4 |
| Total | 10 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=2,295, n miss=140, weighted sample.

## Table11: Index: 'Traditional role model', by level of education

| | Tertiary degree | Qualification with Matura | Qualification without Matura | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Proportion | Proportion | Percentage | Percentage |
| (Somewhat) Disapproval | 89.2 | 68.0 | 58.6 | 67.5 |
| (Rather) approval | 10.8 | 32.0 | 41.4 | 32.5 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=2,295, n miss=157, weighted sample.

## Table12: Attitudes towards heteronormative values, by level of education

| | | Tertiary degree | Secondary school leaving certificate | Qualification without Matura | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Percentage | Proportion | Percentage | Proportion |
| There are only two genders – men and women. | Strongly agree | 9.1 | 25.8 | 29 | 24 |
| | Somewhat agree | 11.8 | 24.2 | 24.3 | 21.7 |
| | Somewhat disagree | 13.7 | 18.7 | 18 | 17 |
| | Strongly disagree | 65.4 | 31.4 | 27.4 | 36.4 |
| | Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| Children should learn as early as possible that homosexuality is normal. | Strongly agree | 72.1 | 49.5 | 36 | 47 |
| | Somewhat agree | 17.6 | 27.9 | 33 | 28.5 |
| | Disagree | 6.1 | 12.1 | 17 | 1 |
| | Strongly disagree | 4.2 | 10.5 | 12.4 | 10.1 |
| | Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| You can choose which gender you identify with. | Strongly agree | 47 | 34 | 3 | 36.4 |
| | Somewhat agree | 24.4 | 29.7 | 32.6 | 30.1 |
| | Disagree | 12.8 | 16.3 | 15.4 | 15 |
| | Strongly disagree | 15.7 | 20.0 | 18.6 | 18.4 |
| | Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=2,295, n miss between 95 and 215, weighted sample.

## Table 13 : Distribution of unpaid domestic work in partnerships (index), by gender

| | Male | Female | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Partner does more | 61 | 9.5 | 34 |
| Balanced distribution | 17 | 15.6 | 16 |
| Respondent takes on more | 21 | 74.9 | 49 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,597, n miss=110, weighted sample.

## Table 14 : Distribution of unpaid domestic work in partnerships (index), by age

| | Under 30 | 30 to 45 | 46 to 65 | Over 65 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Percentage | Percentage | Proportion | Proportion | Share |
| **Partner takes on more** | 12.4 | 25.5 | 42. | 46.1 | 34 |
| **Balanced distribution** | 14.9 | 19.3 | 15.2 | 14.2 | 16.6 |
| **Respondents take on more** | 72.6 | 55.2 | 42 | 39 | 49 |
| **Total** | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,597, n miss=130, weighted sample.

## Table 15 : Distribution of unpaid domestic work in partnerships (index), by number of children

| | Children | No children | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Partner does more** | 38 | 20 | 34 |
| **Balanced distribution** | 14 | 24.5 | 16.5 |
| **Respondent takes on more** | 47 | 55.2 | 49 |
| **Total** | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,597, n miss=125, weighted sample.

## Table16: Distribution of care work in partnerships, by place of residence

| | Larger city (over 100,000 inhabitants) | Small to medium-sized town (10,000 to 100,000 inhabitants) | Rural community (less than 10,000 inhabitants) | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Proportion | Proportion | Proportion | Proportion |
| **Partner takes on more** | 35. | 35 | 41 | 39 |
| **Balanced distribution** | 23.9 | 9.9 | 9.8 | 12.3 |
| **Respondent takes on more** | 40.6 | 54.2 | 48.9 | 48 |
| **Total** | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,429, n miss=221, weighted sample.

## Table17: Distribution of care work in partnerships, by educational level

| | Tertiary qualification | Qualification with Matura | Qualification without secondary school leaving certificate | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Proportion | Proportion | Percentage | Proportion |
| **Partner takes on more** | 32.9 | 37 | 42 | 39 |
| **Balanced distribution** | 20.1 | 8.5 | 11.7 | 12.3 |
| **Respondent takes on more** | 47 | 54.3 | 45.5 | 47 |
| **Total** | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,429, n miss=205, weighted sample.

## Table 18 : Economic situation (if currently in a relationship)

| | Percentage |
|---|---|
| **I live in wealth.** | 0 |
| **I never have to worry about money.** | 26 |
| **I live frugally, so everything always works out fine.** | 63.7 |
| **I can just about afford the bare necessities.** | 9.1 |
| **I often can't even afford the bare necessities.** | 1 |
| **Total** | 10 |

Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023; n=1,891, n miss=38, weighted sample.

## Table19: Working hours in relation to partner, by age

| | Under 30 | 30 to 45 | 46 to 65 | Over 65 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Percentage | Percentage | Proportion | Proportion | Share |
| **Partner works more** | 33.7 | 41 | 32.1 | 36 | 35.8 |
| **Same working hours** | 50.3 | 31.0 | 33.4 | 32.4 | 34.3 |
| **Partner works less** | 16 | 28 | 34 | 30 | 30 |
| **Total** | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,875, n miss=366, weighted sample.

## Table20: Economic relationship in partnerships, by age

| | Under 30 | 30 to 45 | 46 to 65 | Over 65 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Percentage | Percentage | Proportion | Proportion | Per-cent-age |
| **Significantly more than me** | 27.4 | 27.0 | 16.9 | 11.8 | 21.9 |
| **More than me** | 34.5 | 22.5 | 18.2 | 36.5 | 22.1 |
| **Approximately the same amount** | 25.4 | 22.2 | 29.2 | 18.7 | 25.8 |
| **Less than me** | 10.2 | 20 | 26.6 | 32.9 | 22.3 |
| **Significantly less than me** | 2 | 8.2 | 9.1 | | 7 |
| **I don't know** | | 0.1 | | | 0 |
| **Total** | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,891, n miss=366, weighted sample.

## Table 21: "Last say" in family of origin, by gender

| | | male | female | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Who ultimately made decisions regarding the household (e.g. purchases, holidays, etc.), i.e. who had the final say?** | **Father** | 12.90 | 13 | 13 |
| | **Mostly father** | 15.8 | 10.40 | 13 |
| | **Father and mother equally** | 50.10 | 51.50 | 50 |
| | **More likely mother** | 13 | 11.30 | 12.40 |
| | **Mother** | 7.6 | 13.30 | 10.60 |
| | **Total** | 10 | 100 | 100 |

Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=2,295, n miss=95, weighted sample.

## Table22: "Last say": comparison between family of origin and current partnership

| | | Last say (more likely) Mother / Father | Last Say: Parents together | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Male** | **Last say (more likely) Self/partner** | 28 | 31 | 29 |
| | **Both** | 71 | 68.9 | 70.1 |
| **Female** | **Last say (rather) Self/partner** | 41 | 29 | 34 |
| | **Both** | 59 | 70.2 | 65.1 |

Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,891, n miss=93, weighted sample.

## Table23: If in a relationship: Last say in relationship, by education level

| | Tertiary degree | Secondary school leaving certificate | Qualification without Matura | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Proportion | Percentage | Percentage | Share |
| Partner | 8.6 | 12.3 | 14.1 | 12 |
| Together | 63.1 | 60.3 | 57.3 | 59.2 |
| Respondents | 16 | 16 | 15 | 15 |
| Sometimes one, sometimes the other | 12.1 | 11.4 | 13.6 | 12 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,891, n miss=42, weighted sample.

## Table24: Comparison: Unpaid work and 'last say' in the parental household

| 'Last say' in family of origin and housework | (rather) father | Both together | (more likely) Mother | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Partner takes on more | 40. | 33 | 25 | 33 |
| Balanced division of tasks | 12 | 16.6 | 23.9 | 16.9 |
| Respondent takes on more | 47 | 49.7 | 50.3 | 49.1 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| "Last say" in family of origin and care work | (rather) father | Both together | (rather) mother | Total |
| Partner takes on more | 44.5 | 39.6 | 32.7 | 39.6 |
| Balanced division of tasks | 12.6 | 11 | 11 | 11 |
| Respondent takes on more | 43 | 49.5 | 55.8 | 49 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,600, n miss=153 (housework), n=1,429 (care work), n miss = 267; weighted sample.

## Table25: Comparison: housework and attitude variables

| Attitude: 'Mothers with young children should not work' | Strongly agree | Agree | Disagree somewhat | Strongly disagree | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Partner takes on more** | 40.6 | 47 | 33.6 | 22 | 35 |
| **Balanced division of tasks** | 8.2 | 13.7 | 17 | 21.7 | 16 |
| **Respondents take on more** | 51.3 | 38.9 | 49.0 | 56 | 48.6 |
| **Total** | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| **Attitude: "Men should earn an income"** | **Strongly agree** | **Agree somewhat** | **Somewhat disagree** | **Strongly disagree** | **Total** |
| **Partner takes on more** | 58.0 | 42.7 | 42.8 | 23 | 35 |
| **Balanced division of tasks** | 9 | 10.9 | 10.7 | 23 | 16 |
| **Respondent takes on more** | 32.6 | 46 | 46.5 | 53.1 | 48.7 |
| **Total** | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| **Attitude: "Women should be financially independent"** | **Strongly agree** | **Agree somewhat** | **Disagree somewhat** | **Disagree** | **Total** |
| **Partner takes on more** | 28.7 | 50.2 | 37 | 33 | 34 |
| **Balanced division of tasks** | 17.8 | 14.4 | 14 | 15.7 | 16.8 |
| **Respondent takes on more** | 53.5 | 35.4 | 47.9 | 50.7 | 49.2 |
| **Total** | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,600, n miss=153; weighted sample.

## Table26: Comparison: Care work and attitude variables

| Attitude: 'Mothers with young children should not work' | Strongly agree | Agree | Somewhat disagree | Strongly disagree | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Partner takes on more** | 40.1 | 49.2 | 40.3 | 26 | 39 |
| **Balanced division of tasks** | 17.8 | 9.2 | 9 | 16.9 | 12 |
| **Respondent takes on more** | 42 | 41.6 | 50.3 | 56.4 | 48.1 |
| **Total** | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| **Attitude: "Men should earn an income"** | **Strongly agree** | **Agree somewhat** | **Somewhat disagree** | **Strongly disagree** | **Total** |
| **Partner takes on more** | 36.7 | 54. | 41.7 | 28 | 39 |
| **Balanced division of tasks** | 31.9 | 7 | 8.7 | 16 | 12 |
| **Respondent takes on more** | 31.3 | 38.2 | 49.6 | 55.8 | 48.5 |
| **Total** | 10 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=1,429 (care work), n missing between 281 and 265; weighted sample.

## Table27: Reaction to experiences of violence in partnerships

| | Proportion |
|---|---|
| **Not at all** | 4 |
| **I sought help/support** | 13 |
| **Other** | 36 |
| **Total** | 100 |

Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=287, n miss=39; weighted sample.

## Table28: Use of violence in relationships, by gender

| | Male | Female | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Proportion | Proportion | Percentage |
| **No use of violence** | 91.9 | 92.7 | 92.4 |
| **Use of violence** | 8 | 7 | 7 |
| **Total** | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: L&R Datafile 'GEQ-AT', 2023, n=2,206; weighted sample.