

# Decision-Making on Post-Separation Child Custody – Preferences and Experience of Parents

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## Introduction: Physical Custody in Czechia

- **Ca. 40% of marriages end in divorce\***
- **60% of divorcing couples have minor children\***
- **Over 20 thousand children every year affected by a divorce\***
- **Statistics do not include separations of unmarried couples**
- **Ca.  $\frac{3}{4}$  of children entrusted to the care of the mother**
- **Shared custody used increasingly often since the end of the 1990s**
- **\* Czech Statistical Office, data for 2021**

# Introduction: Physical Custody in Czechia

- Discussion among the professional and lay public often emotional, based on personal opinions and myths
- Public opinion x results of foreign studies (Braver and Lamb, Bauserman, Nielsen...)
- Czech research missing, foreign research not known
- Experts call for independent research

## Research description

- **Project Impacts of the rate of parental conflict on children and the role played by post-divorce care arrangements**
- **Carried out by the Research Institute of Labour and Social Affairs**
- **Map the circumstances of the break-up of married and unmarried couples and its effects on the care and raising of children**

## Data / information sources

- **Consultations, interviews and focus groups with experts**
- **Secondary data analysis**
- **Qualitative interviews (parents, young adults)**
- **Public opinion research**
- **Questionnaire survey with parents caring for minors after the break-up**

# Survey design

## 1982 respondents

- 985 men and 997 women who have a minor child
- lived with his/her biological father/mother in the same household for at least 3 months
- at least 12 months have passed since their divorce / breakup
- they take care of this child or have regular contact with him/her

**53% sole custody and 47% equally divided care**

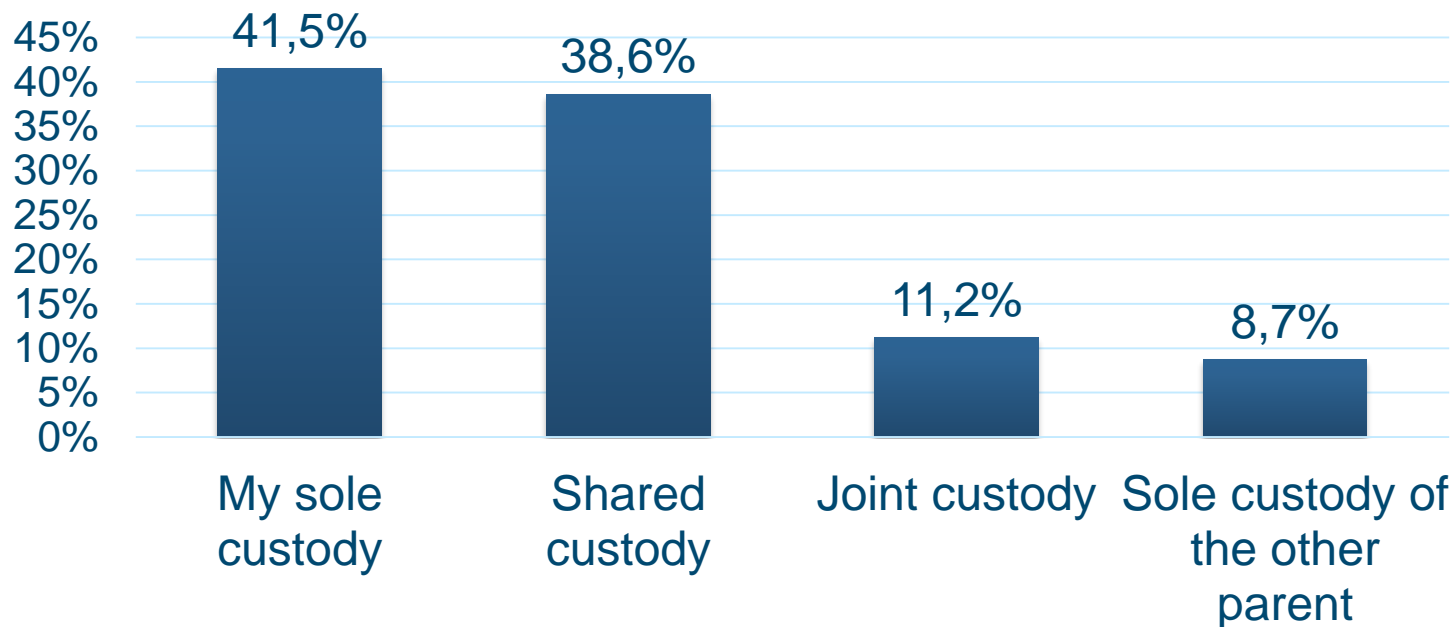
**62% married, 38% unmarried**

**Care arrangement defined based on the number of nights per month spent by respondent**

**Data collection August – October 2021**

## Initial preferences of parents

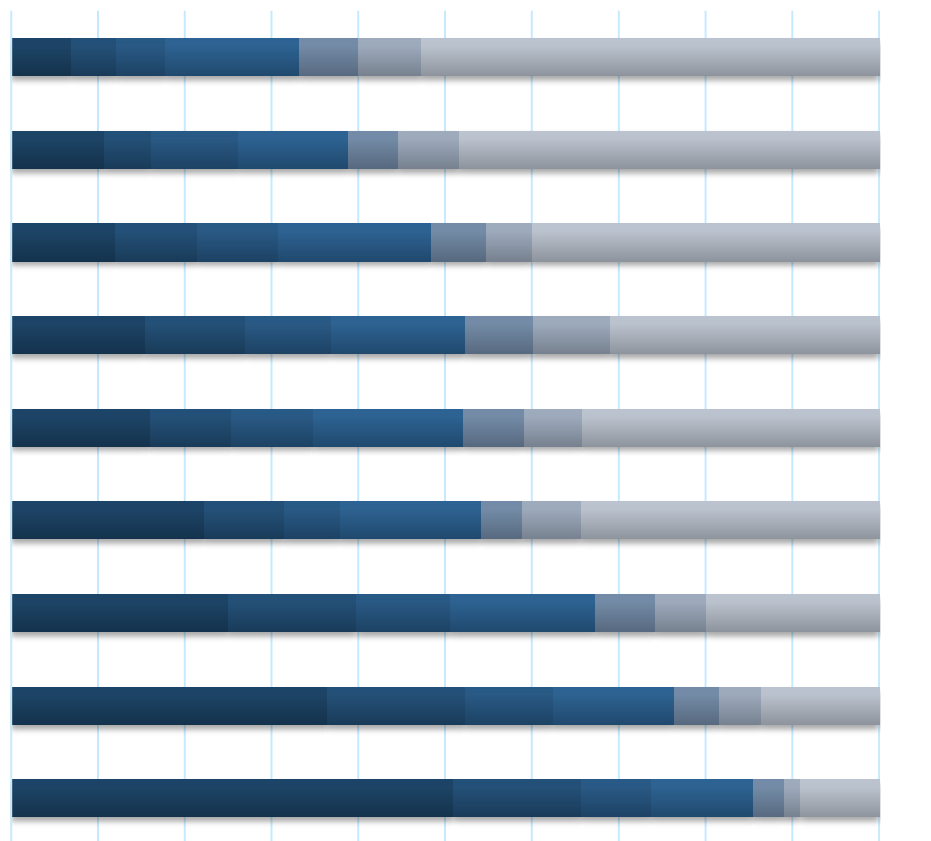
What type of physical custody did you prefer at the beginning?



**Generally accent on the division of care before the breakup and on the well-being of the child**

## Reasons to prefer own sole custody

I decided to give in to the other parent  
if not, my surroundings might resent me  
it improved my negotiating position  
I was afraid I would feel loneliness  
the child could otherwise blame me  
I wanted the other parent to pay alimony  
I wanted to avoid arguing  
I doubted the other parent was able to  
I mostly took care before



0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

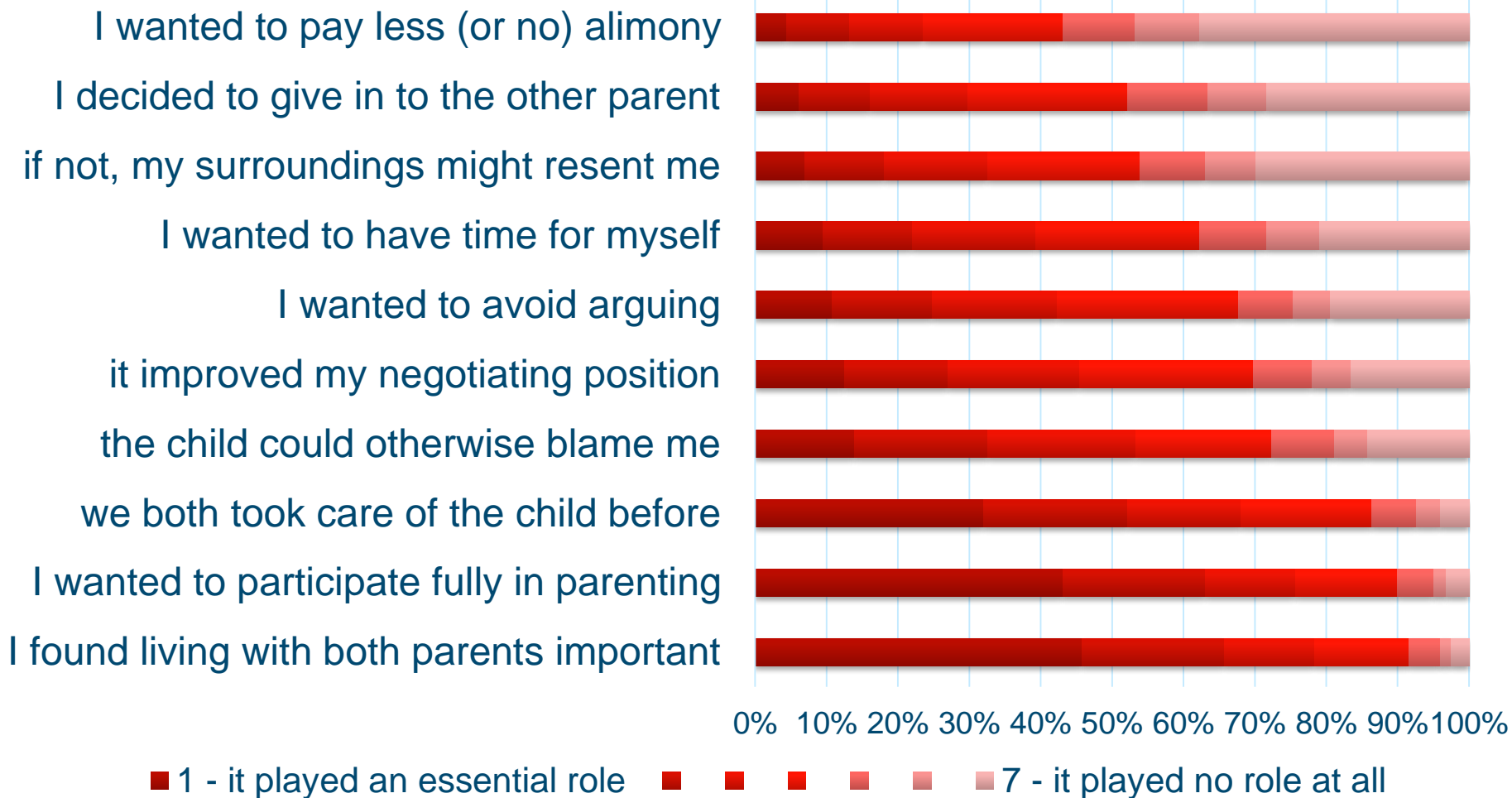
■ 1 - it played an essential role ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ 7 - it played no role at all



## Parents prefer their own sole custody when...

- The child is very young
- Their partnership was complicated and conflictual
- They differed on the division of care for the child and / or the methods of education
- Some of these problems appeared in the household: financial problems, long-term unemployment, violence, addictions
- They didn't have a new partner at the time of the breakup, but the other parent did
- They were not married
- Are religious
- Have a lower educational attainment (at least one without secondary school-leaving exam)

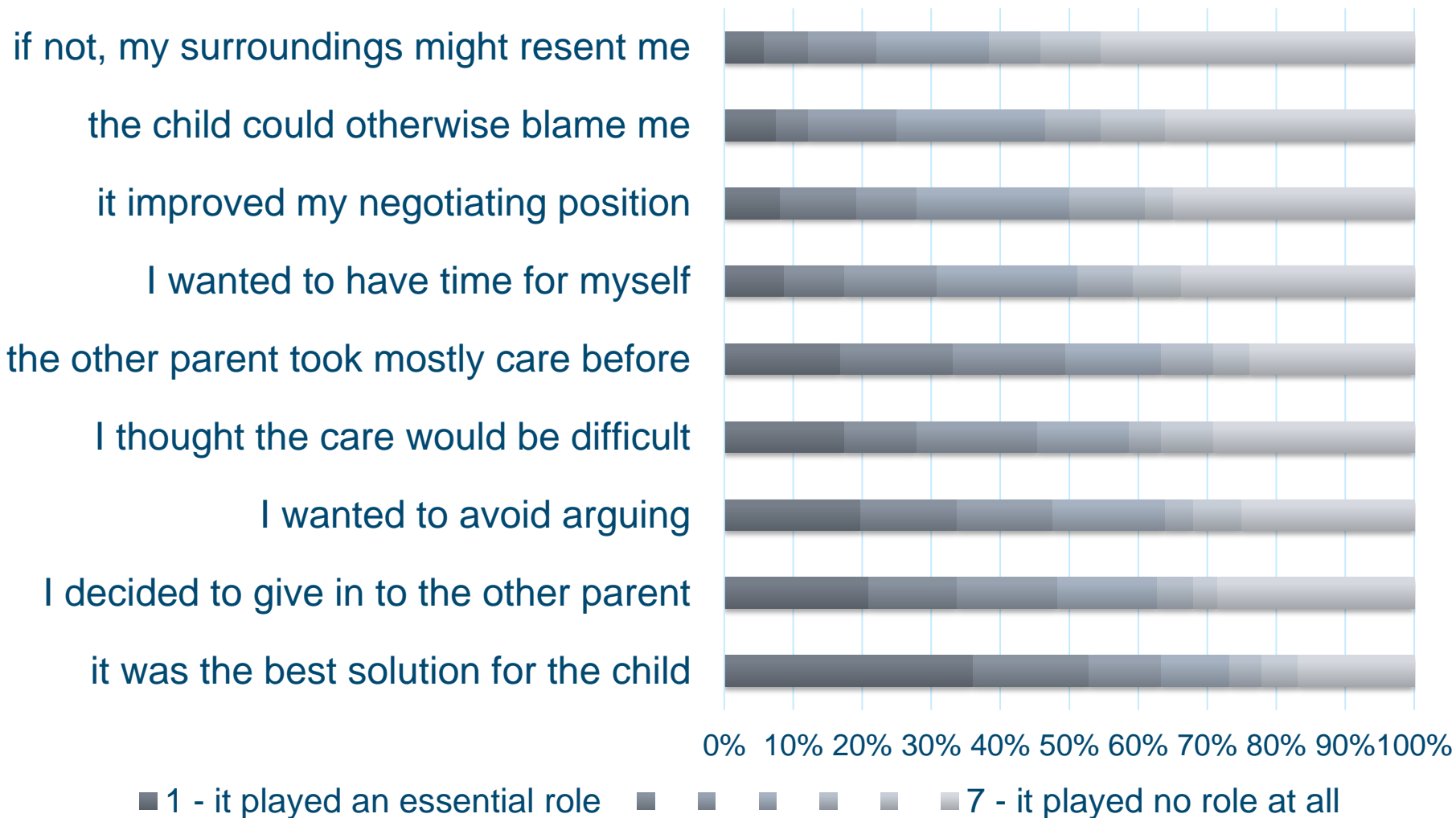
## Reasons to prefer shared / joint custody



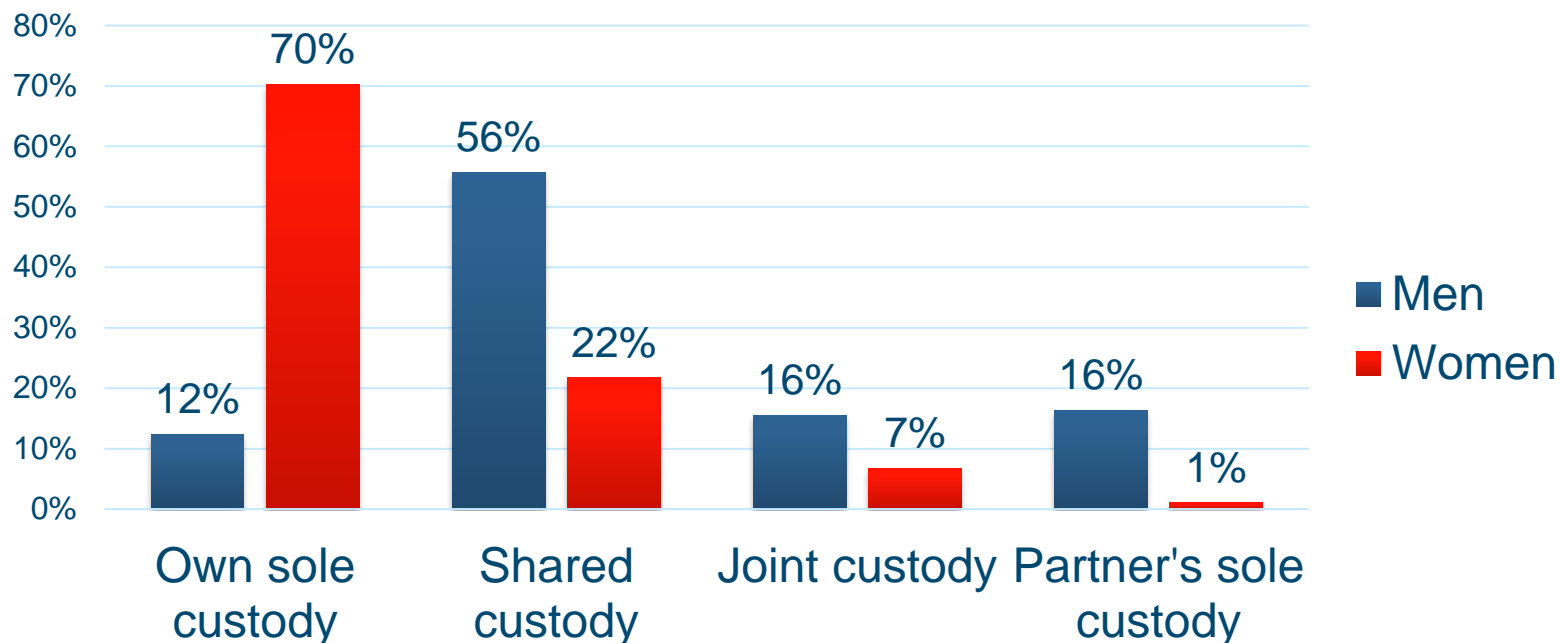
## Parents prefer shared custody when...

- The child is older (school age)
- Both parents agree they should end their relationship
- They were married
- They are atheists
- Have higher educational attainment (both at least secondary school-leaving exam)

## Reasons to prefer partner's sole custody



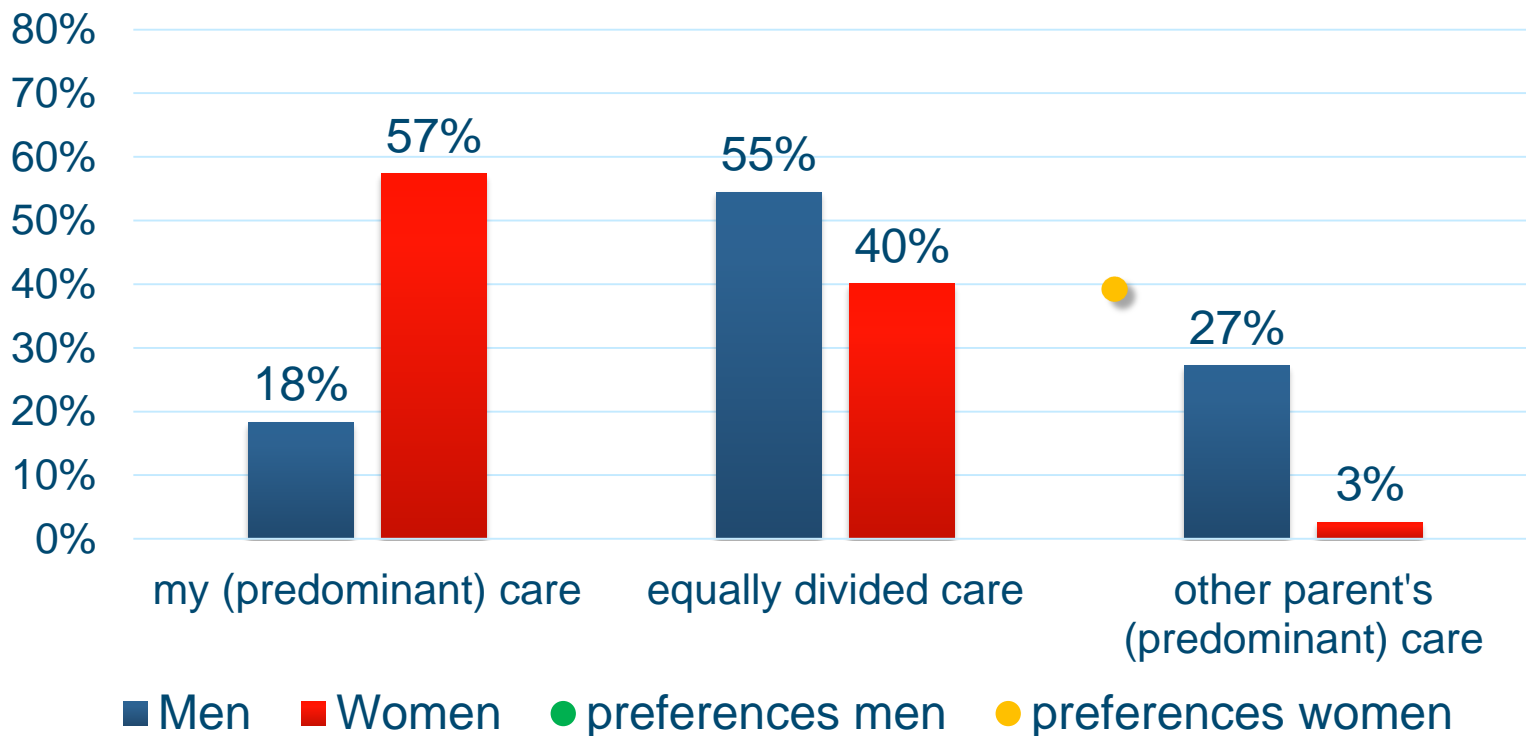
## Fathers' and mothers' preferences



**52.5% of respondents had the same preferences as their former spouse, 47.5% differed on the choice of physical custody**

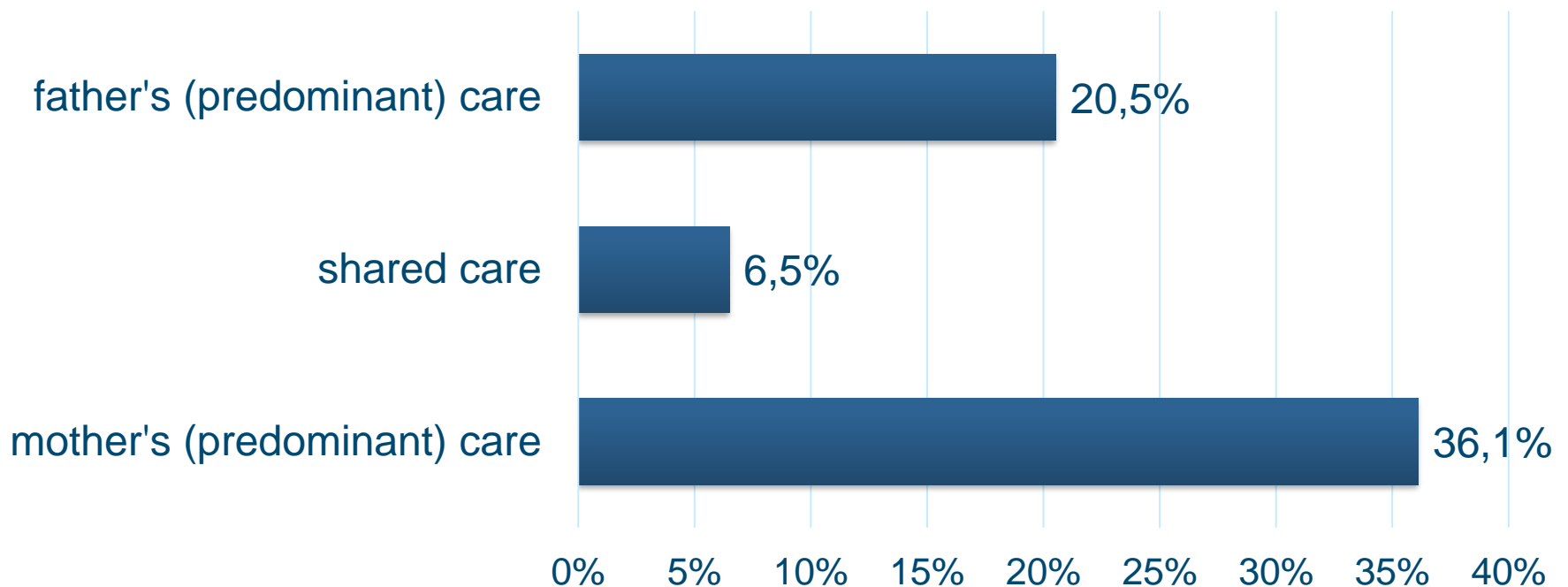
**Agreement more often were shared or joint custody is preferred (sole custody more controversial)**

## Reality – Division of care at present



# Changes over time

## Proportion of arrangements that have changed



**Especially if the child was aged 0 – 6 at the time of the separation**





## Conclusion

**When choosing a care arrangement, parents consider the division of roles (and especially care) before the separation**

**Mothers: sole custody x fathers: shared / joint custody**

**Intensive conflicts and pathologies → sole custody**

**Youngest children → sole custody of the mother, but this arrangement may be later renegotiated**

# Thank you for your attention!

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