

# PERCEPTION OF HOME AFTER PARENTS' BREAKUP

Jana Barvíková, Štěpánka Lehmann, Jana Paloncyová, Sylva Höhne

Research Institute for Labour and Social Affairs (RILSA), Prague, Czech Republic

## Introduction

This poster presents partial findings from the RILSA research project (2019-2023). Attention is paid to public opinion on the organization of childcare after a breakup/divorce with the focus on the topic of home. However, its main focus is on the partial results of the qualitative research aimed at young people aged 16-29 who have experienced a family breakdown. **How do young people with the experience of a family breakdown perceive the home, what do they think contributes to the child not feeling/feeling at home in their parent's home, and how do they perceive the negatives and positives of shared custody in this regard?**

## Methods

A combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods:

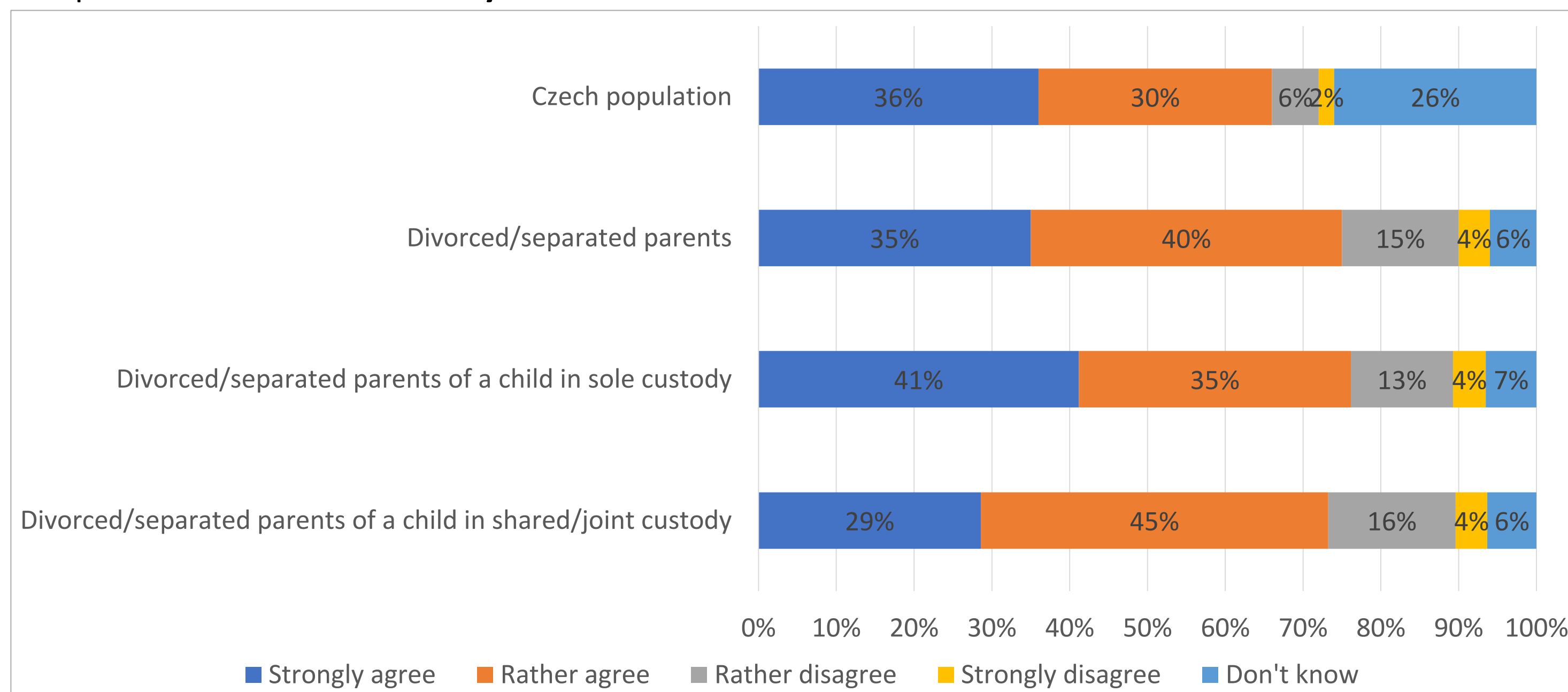
- *Family Stability 2020* - public opinion poll (N 1 691)
- *Child in Parental Conflict 2021* - questionnaire survey focused on parents caring for minor children after breakup/divorce (N 1 978)
- *How do children live after their parents' separation?* - 31 in-depth interviews with young people aged 16-29 with the experience of a family breakdown during their childhood or adolescence / thematic analysis

## Results

### Organization of childcare after breakup/divorce with the focus on the topic of home

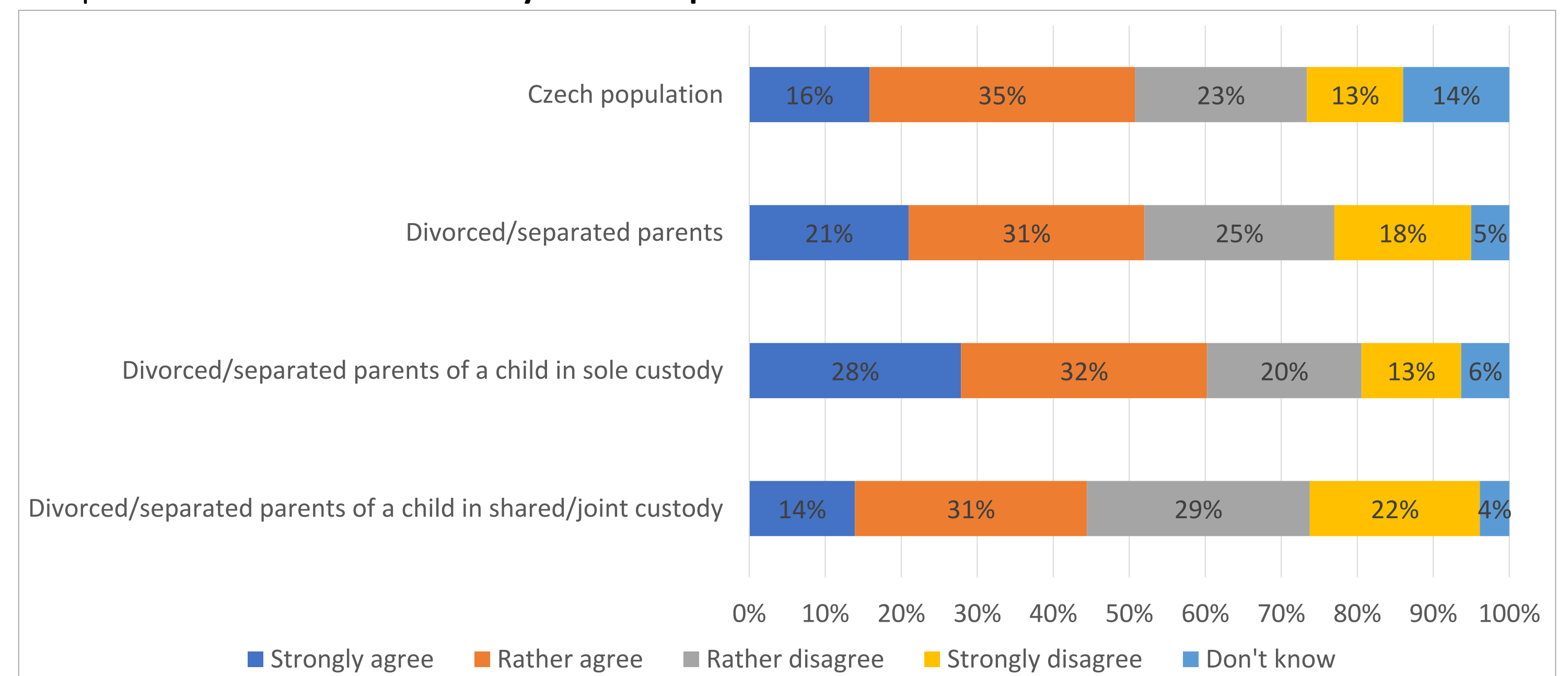
- A majority of Czech public believes that a child needs a stable environment for their successful development and, after the separation of the parents, a care arrangement that will provide them with one permanent home. This is most often considered to be the sole custody of one of the parents, which at the same time is the most common type of childcare arrangement after divorce in the Czech Republic (the proportion of cases where the court entrusted the child to the sole custody of the mother was 72,5 % in 2021).
- Although the proportion of children placed in shared care has been increasing slightly in the past decade (17 % in 2021), it is viewed as a model in which the child suffers from permanent moving and moving their belongings between parents' households without experiencing a sense of home and stability - a child as "a backpacker with no real home".
- Among parents with experience of caring for a child after separation/divorce, these attitudes are held mainly by those whose child is in sole custody of one of the parents with minimal contact with the other parent, and least often by those whose child is in shared or joint custody and their contact with both parents is more or less equal.

Graph 1. A child in sole custody has one home



Source: Family Stability 2020, Child in Parental Conflict 2021

Graph 2. A child in shared custody is a "backpacker" without a real home



Source: Family Stability 2020, Child in Parental Conflict 2021

### How do young people with the experience of family breakdown perceive the home?

Regardless of the type of custody:

- no feeling of home
- a feeling of home in one parent's household
- a feeling of home in both parents' homes
- a feeling of home is not tied to a specific place, but it is felt in the presence of one's own family members
- a feeling of home is not tied to a place or one's own family, but it is felt among other close people (e.g., group of friends, sport team, boyfriend's/girlfriend's family)

### Factors of feeling of home

	Where I feel at home	Where I don't feel at home
<b>Dimension of relationships</b>	<p><b>I feel good there</b></p> <p>Where the atmosphere is good/better (peace and well-being; open communication; unconditional love and acceptance; understanding, empathy, interest, attention to the child; understandable rules; good relations between all members of the household – even with the new partner)</p> <p>The parent tries to cooperate, communicate and deal fairly with the other parent - he does not involve me in disputes between them (I can be a child) and does not talk about the other parent (so) negatively</p> <p>I feel sorry for this parent, I protect him - I am in coalition with him</p>	<p><b>I don't feel good there</b></p> <p>Where there is a negative atmosphere (disputes; conflict communication; conditional love, non-acceptance – child does not accept new partner/partner does not accept child; lack of interest, lack of attention; unclear rules, unnamed expectations from the child; major financial and other concerns – excessive stress and burden on the parent)</p> <p>The parent does not try to cooperate, communicate and deal fairly with the other parent - possibly involves me in disputes between them (I cannot be a child), speaks negatively about the other parent, I negotiate solutions for the parents, give them their messages, etc.</p> <p>I blame this parent for the breakup of the family</p>
<b>Dimension of space and personal territory</b>	<p><b>I like it there</b></p> <p>I'm used to it, I grew up there</p> <p>I have positive memories associated with the place, its appearance and the things there</p> <p>I have influence there, I'm not just one who adapts</p> <p>I have my own space there, where I have my privacy (own room/shared room with siblings, bed, closets) and my things - household members respect my space and privacy</p> <p>I have a nice room there - I decorated it myself</p>	<p><b>I don't like it there, I'm a stranger there</b></p> <p>I have no relation to this place, its appearance and things there, I am not bound to it by my long-term memories and experiences (due to moving, it is my x-th potential home)</p> <p>I am tied to our former apartment, my room and the things in it...</p> <p>I have bad memories associated with the place</p> <p>I don't feel like I have an influence there, I'm the one who just adapts</p> <p>I don't have my own space or privacy there, or I have it and I don't at the same time - it's not respected</p> <p>I don't like my room there (that much)</p>
<b>Dimension of self-realization</b>	<p><b>It is fun there, there is how and there is someone I can have fun with</b></p> <p>The place fits into the life I live and want to live - the same friends, school, clubs; for young people a practical location for meeting friends and returning late (easy access by public transport)</p>	<p><b>There is nothing to do there, no way or/and nobody to have fun with</b></p> <p>Because of this place I have to change my life (friends, school, clubs), give up my needs/dreams, or it costs me too much time and effort to keep them (difficult, long commute)</p>

### Associated negatives and positives of shared custody

- The degree of burden associated with alternating parental households is very individual - for some it does not represent any problem, for others over time (especially during adolescence) it is the main reason for the preference of permanent living with one of the parents and the possible terminating of shared custody.
- For somebody the gain from confronting this burden is the acquisition of specific competencies such as flexibility, the ability to think ahead and plan, independence. For many children the demands of alternating between two homes are outweighed by the benefits they feel from shared custody, which is why they prefer it despite the experienced difficulties.

(-)

- Forgetting things; the feeling that I don't know which of my things I have in which apartment
- Challenging logistics of transport and moving things; the need to plan when, where I will be and what I will need there → for somebody considerable stress because of constantly packing and moving things
- Without a single place of background some suffer from feeling unanchored

(+)

- The possibility to live with both parents (not just see each other)
- Preserving the relationship, closeness with both parents
- More attention from both parents
- Diversity "...each parent gave me something completely different, I had the opportunity to meet two completely different worlds" (female, 18 years old)
- More intensive contact with extended family, with parents' new partners and their families (step-grandparents), step-siblings
- The possibility of escaping to the other household as a prevention (intensification) of conflicts with members of both households
- Maneuvering – the ability to obtain the consent of the second parent when the first did not
- More toys, gifts, Christmas, holidays, etc.

### Summary

- Even sole custody does not guarantee the feeling of home for children.
- If the feeling of home is missing, the mere existence of two homes is not the reason - some of the child's basic needs probably haven't been met.
- The feeling of home in the households of both parents is one of the main factors that influences whether children perceive shared custody positively.
- Alternating between two homes in shared custody may not be a major problem for most children, however, such an arrangement may not suit every child or it may not suit them in all phases of childhood and adolescence.



Jana Barvíková

[jana.barvikova@vupsv.cz](mailto:jana.barvikova@vupsv.cz)

<https://www.vupsv.cz/en/projects/?id=337>

### Acknowledgements

This poster is the output of the project "Impacts of the rate of parental conflict on children and the role played by post-divorce care arrangements", which is solved within the framework of the Long-term concept of the development of the research organization for the period 2018-2022 approved by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs on the basis of Decision No. 7- RVO/2018 on the provision of institutional support for the long-term conceptual development of a research organization.