

Gendered Negotiations of Unemployment. A Qualitative Interview Study With Turkish Fathers in Germany and Türkiye

Culture & Psychology

2026, Vol. 32(3) 807–833

© The Author(s) 2026



Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/1354067X261459997

journals.sagepub.com/home/cap

Anna Sieben^{1,2} , Umut Beşpınar³ , Zeynep Beşpınar⁴ ,
Ladin Gürdal⁵ , Zeynep Kapısız² , Nebi Sümer⁵,
Öznur Uşaklılar³  and Ezel Üsten¹ 

Abstract

This qualitative study examines how unemployed Turkish fathers in Germany and Türkiye navigate their paternal identities amidst shifting gender roles and socioeconomic challenges. Based on 21 in-depth interviews, four distinct masculinity types were identified: disappointed, religious, playful, and stay-at-home fatherhood. These identity patterns transcend national borders and socioeconomic status, suggesting a transnational cultural continuity among Turkish fathers. While unemployment challenges the traditional breadwinner ideal, it also provides opportunities for alternative constructions of fatherhood through caregiving, community engagement, or religious devotion. Findings highlight how unemployment can lead to either heightened vulnerability or the development of adaptive new identities. Clear differences emerge between Germany and Türkiye in response to their different social welfare systems. While there is strong dissatisfaction with state support in Türkiye and fathers are often dependent on financial support from their families, the situation in Germany allows fathers to enjoy greater satisfaction with their lives and to develop alternative identities. Future research should

¹Forschungszentrum Jülich, Institute for Advanced Simulation, Jülich, Germany

²Bergische University Wuppertal, Institute for Psychology, Wuppertal, Germany

³Middle East Technical University, Department of Sociology, Ankara, Türkiye

⁴Marmara University, Department of Sociology, Istanbul, Türkiye

⁵Sabancı University, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Istanbul, Türkiye

Corresponding Author:

Anna Sieben, Institute for Advanced Simulation (IAS-7), Forschungszentrum Jülich, Wilhelm-Johnen-Straße, Jülich 52425, Germany; Bergische Universität Wuppertal, Wuppertal, Germany.

Email: an.sieben@fz-juelich.de

incorporate the perspectives of spouses and children to better understand the broader family dynamics of unemployment.

Keywords

unemployment, fatherhood, fathering, Türkiye, Germany, qualitative methods

Introduction

Involuntary unemployment is a challenging life situation for most people, financially, emotionally, and socially. Many people in this situation think not only about how to find work or make ends meet but also reflect on their lives, relationships, and sense of self. Unemployment can be a time of negotiating who you are or who you want to be. On the one hand, these negotiations may involve interpreting unemployment as a personal failure to live up to the dominant ideal of professional success, but they may also involve references to alternative discourses on good life, moral values, or forms of active participation in the community (beyond simply contributing financially). These individual negotiations are likely deeply rooted in cultural and social contexts (e.g., family and circle of friends) that place varying degrees of value on, for example, professional work. We build on cultural-psychological theories that regard these processes of negotiation and coping with contradictions and contingencies as constitutive of modern identities (i.e., [Straub, 2002](#)). Accordingly, in crises like unemployment, people search for (new) meaning by reorienting and reauthoring their life narratives. Fathers are no exception. [Roy \(2006\)](#), for example, illustrates an ongoing reconstruction of paternal identity in the face of unemployment. We suggest that this is particularly critical for fathers who face strong sociocultural expectations to fulfil the breadwinner role, or who identify as the main provider for their family. Similarly, [Willott and Griffin \(2004\)](#) demonstrate that long-term unemployed working-class men in the UK, despite their exclusion from paid employment, continue to draw upon the breadwinner ideal to sustain a sense of masculine and moral worth, as their limited access to economic and symbolic capital constrains alternative identity constructions.

In modern societies, people in general (fathers in particular) encounter a plurality of possibilities for meaning-making and presenting themselves. At the same time, this plurality should not be mistaken for complete openness or arbitrariness. Particularly in the realm of gender identity, clear and strong cultural ideals often shape which forms of masculinity and femininity are considered acceptable. We follow the concept of plural masculinities ([Aboim, 2016](#)), which recognises both the material and symbolic bases of masculinity, as well as the cultural and structural opportunities and constraints shaping the identity construction process. The concept of plural masculinities also provides us with the important insight that identities are relationally constructed through interaction with significant others – for example, masculinity takes shape through engagement with women, children, and families.

The increasing plurality of forms of fatherhood is the subject of various empirical studies. Although breadwinning remains a significant role for fathers, their involvement

in raising children has changed considerably in recent decades (Faircloth, 2014; Miller, 2017; Westerling, 2015). This statement holds true for Germany and Türkiye, despite cultural differences. In both countries, the ideal of an “involved” or “new” father, who actively and intentionally spends time with his children, has been disseminated (Beşpınar, 2015; Merkle & Wippermann, 2008), potentially changing the self-negotiations of unemployed fathers.

In Türkiye, five categories of fatherhood have been distinguished: traditional, new traditional, keen, diligent, and exceptional fatherhood (AÇEV, 2017). The two traditional types of fatherhood are still dominant, but for almost 40% of fathers (keen, diligent, exceptional), emotional involvement with their children has become more important. Beşpınar and Beşpınar (2018) also focused on the cultural differences between secular and religious fathers in Türkiye and showed that both groups emphasized paternal emotional involvement and providing educational opportunities, especially for daughters. Fathers from both groups consider value transmission the most important dimension of paternal involvement. Although the values they transmit differ, they share the view that passing on values is one of the central responsibilities of fatherhood. In addition, Beşpınar (2015) studied the ideal of “new fatherhood” among middle-class secular fathers. These fathers defined the presence, involvement, and prioritization of children’s needs as the ideals of good and new fatherhood. Nevertheless, the fathers in that study were still highly attached to their work and perceived their professional identity and breadwinner role as essential to their masculinity (Beşpınar, 2015).

In Germany, widespread changes towards an ideal of “involved fatherhood” have been shown, including specifications for different social milieus (Merkle & Wippermann, 2008). However, studies on fathers of Turkish descent in Germany are scarce, reflecting a more general research gap on migrant fathers (Geisen & Niermann, 2013). A few existing studies show that Turkish fathers in Germany orient themselves towards both ideals of involved fatherhood and the more traditional ideal of fathers as breadwinners and authoritative figures who lead their families (Spohn, 2002; Tunç, 2008, as cited in Geisen & Niermann, 2013). In a qualitative study with fathers of Turkish origin, Geisen and Niermann (2013) show that Turkish fathers in Germany understand fatherhood primarily as a matter of responsibility. In addition to being the primary breadwinners, they emphasize their role in passing on their Turkish culture. Similar to the studies of Beşpınar (2015) and Beşpınar and Beşpınar (2018) in Türkiye, the most obvious transformation in the father’s role can be seen among the highly-educated migrants who clearly want to be present to see their children grow up. This opening up of the fatherhood concept is not accompanied by a reconceptualization of the idea of the father as the bread-winner (Geisen & Niermann, 2013). Therefore, we note that previous studies show a remarkable similarity between Turkish fathers in Germany and Türkiye in terms of their fathering orientation.

At the same time that ideals of fatherhood have changed, women in Germany and Türkiye have increased their level of education, success, and income. However, in both countries, these changes have also been accompanied by an unequal distribution of household work and time spent with children (for Germany: BMFSFJ, 2020; for Türkiye: Turkish Statistical Institute [TÜİK], 2020). In Germany, the majority (77%) of women work (Statista, 2020). However, empirical research has repeatedly shown that becoming a

parent often leads to a re-traditionalization of gender roles among couples, with women taking longer parental leave and reducing their working hours. In 2023, 49.1% of mothers and 84% of fathers with children under the age of six were employed. 73% of these employed mothers and only 8.6% of these fathers work part-time ([Statistisches Bundesamt, 2025](#)). In Türkiye, in 2023, the labour force participation rate among women aged 15 and older is 35.8%, while it is 71.2% for men; among 25–49-year-olds with a child under the age of three in their household, the employment rate for women was 27.1%, while the rate for men was 90.1% ([TÜİK, 2025](#)).

Considering these intercultural, intergenerational, and societal dynamics, this study targets a unique population: unemployed fathers of Turkish descent living in Germany and compares them with Turkish fathers living in Türkiye. On the one hand, the Turkish community in Germany (here defined as people of Turkish descent with German or Turkish citizenship; including first, second, and third generation) is very diverse, also in terms of gender ([Geisen & Niermann, 2013](#); [Tunç, 2011](#)). For example, women of Turkish descent in the first and second generation have shown a sharp increase in their level of education (from 18.8% to 26.4%; [BAMF, 2018](#)) and are now equally qualified for the labour market as men. On the other hand, parts of the Turkish community are known to hold traditional social, religious, and cultural values ([Aktürk, 2020](#)). This includes more traditional gender role ideals. In fact, the gap between the employment rate of men (80%) and women (40%) in the Turkish community is larger than in the general German population (82% for men, 77% for women) ([BAMF, 2018](#)). In Türkiye, traditional gender roles have a stronger influence on the inclusion of women (35%) and mothers (13%) in the labour market.

This qualitative interview study analyses how fathers' unemployment intersects with their gendered ideals of family care and paternal identity. Unemployment may open up a window in fathers' lives that allows them to play a greater role in childcare and housework. Indeed, [Castrillo et al. \(2021\)](#) found that unemployed fathers in Spain increasingly integrated child care into their identity. Similarly, [Hennecke and Pape \(2020\)](#) found that unemployed fathers devoted additional time to childcare and housework during the week, especially when their partners were employed (but not on weekends). [Legarreta-Iza and Sagastizabal Emilio-Yus \(2023\)](#) concluded that prolonged unemployment increases identification with caregiving. Unemployed immigrant fathers in some European contexts appear to adopt more egalitarian gender roles. For example, [Bergnehr \(2022\)](#) showed that unemployed fathers from the Middle East shared daily chores and childcare more equally with their spouses when they resettled in Sweden than they did in their home countries. [Roy \(2004\)](#) found that adaptive skills and role flexibility were critical factors in redefining provider role expectations among unemployed African American fathers, leading them to find alternative ways to connect with their children. Similarly, [Komarovsky \(2004\)](#) showed that patriarchal and traditional fathers are more vulnerable to unemployment and less able to cope with it compared to fathers who adopt a more flexible approach to traditional gender roles. [Strier's \(2014\)](#) qualitative work, similar to the project presented in this article, explores the relationship between unemployment and fatherhood through unemployed Palestinian fathers in Israel. "Work is the soul of men," says one of her interviewees (p. 402). Unemployment represents a serious threat to the "soul" or psychological well-being of men and fathers and is

perceived as a risk factor for families. However, unemployment also appears as a possible opportunity to reconstruct their paternal identities and to build new relationships with their children, for example, by spending more time at home, playing together for the first time, and having fun (Strier, 2014). Considering the intensified journeys of migrant fathers across cultures in the recent decades, Parke and Cookston (2021) proposed the emergence of “transnational fathers,” highlighting their unique risks and resilience factors.

In summary, previous studies have shown that unemployed fathers are challenged by several parallel discourses of fatherhood: the traditional breadwinner model is challenged by unemployment itself. At the same time, the breadwinner model is challenged by discourses of gender equality and involved fatherhood. We argue that these overlapping discourses may increase the risk of fathers being perceived -by themselves or others- as “failures,” but they may also allow for the development of new models of fatherhood with positive connotations.

Research Questions

How do unemployed fathers in Türkiye and Germany frame and reframe their fatherhood in light of their unemployment? To what extent do they contribute to childcare and household chores during periods of unemployment? And how do they negotiate their gender identities amid unemployment? These questions gain particular significance within a cross-cultural and migration perspective: How do Turkish fathers in Türkiye and Germany navigate and adapt to competing discourses on fatherhood while being situated between different cultural contexts? To explore these questions, the current article draws on semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews with unemployed Turkish fathers living in Germany and Türkiye. The open approach to conducting interviews is suitable for bringing out the negotiation processes related to one’s own identity (Straub & Ruppel, 2024). By specifically asking about relationships with children, wives, other family members, and friends, we also explore the relational aspect of identity formation as a father, which is central to the concept of plural masculinity (Aboim, 2016). This conceptual framework allows us to understand how men negotiate their fathering roles across varying socioeconomic and cultural contexts.

Working Definition and Governmental Contexts of Unemployment

Unemployment is an umbrella term that covers different life and legal situations. This is even more true when we compare unemployment in Germany and Türkiye. In Germany, unemployed persons “are those who cannot find paid employment to secure their own livelihood or that of their families. In order to be considered unemployed, these persons must be capable of working, willing to work and registered with the employment agency.” (Schubert & Klein, 2020, translation Anna Sieben). However, in everyday life and in self-perception, this category is blurred for people whose unemployment is associated with physical or mental illness or forms of disability. In these cases, the unemployed may be (partially) registered as retired or on sick leave. An additional

complication is that some of those registered as unemployed are working illegally (undeclared work to avoid taxation). Furthermore, in the context of migration, some people who have just arrived are unemployed without receiving unemployment benefits (e.g., waiting for a work permit or for their certificates to be accepted). The official unemployment rate for 2024 in Germany is 6.0% (Statista, 2025).

In Türkiye, unemployment is less clearly regulated and therefore, fewer people are officially registered as unemployed. According to TÜİK (2025), unemployment is defined as follows: “During the reference period, all non-institutional working-age individuals who were not employed, who used at least one active job search channel in the last four weeks to look for work, and who were available to start working within two weeks, are included in the unemployed population.” Based on the results of the Household Labor Force Survey, TÜİK announced that the unemployment rate among individuals aged 15 and older stood at 8.7% in 2024. The unemployment rate was 7.1% for men and 11.8% for women (Labor Force Statistics, 2024). At the 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians organized by the International Labour Organization (ILO), it was acknowledged that the conventional unemployment rate alone is inefficient to measure labour market dynamics underscoring the need for alternative indicators. Alongside the core labour force indicators, the alternative measures identified include “time-related underemployment,” “potential labour force,” and “unemployment.” In Türkiye, TÜİK revised its survey questionnaires in 2021 according to this framework and announced that the combined underutilized labour rate—comprising time-related underemployment, the potential labour force, and the unemployed—was 26.7% in 2024. Therefore, unemployment is often blurred with situations of job insecurity, such as for day labourers or migrant workers.

Furthermore, the government support systems in Germany and Türkiye are quite different. In Germany, unemployed people are mostly registered as such and are thus included in a financial and counselling support program. In Türkiye, unemployment benefits are provided solely to insured unemployed individuals. The rate of informal employment without insurance in Türkiye, otherwise referred to as work that is not contracted, protected by law, or covered by social security, was recorded at 26.1% in 2023. Within the agricultural sector, the rate was calculated at 80.6%, whereas in the non-agricultural sector, it was recorded at 16.6% (İŞKUR, 2025). This widespread informality significantly limits workers’ access to unemployment benefits. Specifically, this difference in the support system in Germany and Türkiye is also evident in the sample examined here: while all fathers interviewed in Germany received financial support (which is usually also granted to their wives and children), this is only the case for two of the fathers interviewed in Türkiye, and for one of them only for a period of six months (see Results section for details).

Finally, at the time when the empirical data of this study was collected (2023–2024), Türkiye was undergoing a severe economic crisis characterized by very high inflation rates. In the same period, the economic situation in Germany was not flourishing but relatively stable.

When these factors are considered together, it becomes clear that fathers in Türkiye, (a) are more likely to experience unemployment, (b) even when employed, are more likely to engage in irregular or insecure forms of work, and (c) in the event of

unemployment, often receive no financial support at all, leaving their ability to provide for their families far more precarious than that of fathers in Germany.

Methods

Sample

As a sampling criterion, we used self-identification as unemployed. This excluded, for example, people who are registered as unemployed but work illegally (and see themselves as working fathers). On the other hand, people who are officially registered as disabled sometimes see themselves as unemployed if they feel they could still work and are included in the sample (1 person). We also interviewed employed fathers in the same study, but do not use that material in this article.

Unemployed Turkish fathers turned out to be a particularly challenging group to recruit in both countries. This difficulty was caused by three main factors: the shame associated with unemployment, distrust of university staff perceived as “close to the state” (in Germany, some potential interviewees worried we might be investigating “undeclared work”), and the “hidden” social milieus in which these fathers lived. Interviewees were found through neighbourhood WhatsApp groups, but primarily through personal networks, such as distant acquaintances at mosques, local muhtars (village heads), extended family members, or by visiting cafes, taxi stands, local bazaars, cemevis (Alevite cultural and religious centres) and fast-food restaurants. The interviews in Germany were conducted in Wuppertal, Bochum, Essen, Mannheim, Karlsruhe, Offenheim, while those in Türkiye took place in Ankara, Istanbul, and Izmir.

The sample consists of 21 qualitative interviews conducted with 11 fathers in Germany and 10 fathers in Türkiye. In both countries, the sample is very diverse in terms of educational background, age, number of children, ethnicity, wife’s employment status, socioeconomic status (SES), and religiosity (see [Table 1](#)). The marital status of the fathers in the sample is very similar (all are married, except one widow and one divorced and single father). The length of unemployment varies greatly: Two interviewees have never had regular employment, while three interviewees state that they have been unemployed for more than three years. About one-third have been unemployed for approximately two years, another third for several months. Some individuals have only been out of work for a few weeks. In many cases, it is difficult to ascertain the precise length of unemployment, as some interviewees have previously been in precarious or irregular work, and provided only vague responses regarding their employment history.

Interviews: Data Collection and Interpretation

Most interviews were conducted face-to-face and fully recorded. Meeting locations were arranged by the interviewers: either at the interviewee’s home or at a mutually convenient place, such as a café. Some individual interviews were conducted online via video calls with the audio track recorded. The interviews, all in Turkish, ranged from 30 minutes to 3 hours in length and were conducted as problem-centred interviews ([Witzel & Reiter, 2012](#)). A total of 10 different interviewers were involved. As mentioned above, the

Table 1. Overview Sample

ID	Country	Age	Education level	Occupation	Number of children	Spouse employment status	Perceived SES (out of 10)
DE2_Mar23	Germany	47	University	Environment Engineer	2	Unemployed	1
DE3_Mar23	Germany	34	Secondary school	—	4	Unemployed	6
DE9_Mar23	Germany	40	High school	Truck Driver	4	(Divorced)	5
DE25_Oct23	Germany	52	No formal education	Shepherd, Cleaner	6	Unemployed	6
DE26_Oct23	Germany	35	High school	Metal worker	2	Unemployed	3
DE27_Nov23	Germany	33	University	Software Consultant	2	Employed	7
DE28_Nov23	Germany	49	High school	Construction worker	5	Employed	Not stated
DE29_Nov23	Germany	41	High school	Grocer	5	Employed	6
DE32_Feb24	Germany	51	University	Chess Instructor	2	Employed	7
DE33_Mar24	Germany	54	University	Machinery Technician	4	(Widow)	2
DE31_Jan24	Germany	42	Master's degree	Data Analyst	1	Employed	5
TR2_Mar23	Türkiye	42	University	Aquaculture Engineer	3	Unemployed	4
TR3_Mar23	Türkiye	40	Secondary school	Freelancer	3	Unemployed	1
TR5_May23	Türkiye	39	High school	Electrical Maintenance Technician	2	Employed	5
TR6_May23	Türkiye	41	University	Marketing Manager	2	Employed	3
TR7_Jun23	Türkiye	45	University	Freelancer	3	Unemployed	3
TR18_Sep23	Türkiye	49	University	Teacher	2	Unemployed	7
TR23_Jan24	Türkiye	44	University	Administrative staff	1	Employed	5
TR24_Mar24	Türkiye	41	Master's degree	Geography teacher	2	Employed	3
TR30_Aug24	Türkiye	47	High school	Manager	2	Unemployed	1
TR34_Sep24	Türkiye	37	Primary school	Construction Foreman	3	Unemployed	2

sample analysed here is part of a larger project that also included interviews with Turkish working fathers.

Before the interviews began, the participants were fully informed about the confidentiality of their data and asked to sign an informed consent form and an incentive payment form. We followed the German Sociological Association's Ethical Codex. Ethical approval came from Sabancı University Ethics Committee (No. FASS-2022-52). Interviewees each received 20 Euros/200 Turkish Lira for their participation.

At the beginning of each interview, we asked the interviewees to introduce themselves without any specific prompts or thematic focus. Subsequently, seven main topics were discussed (see [Appendix](#) for the complete interview guide in Turkish and its English translation): (1) children and fatherhood, with particular attention to everyday childcare practices), (2) relationships with the wife, including expectations and sources of conflicts, (3) relationships with his own family and his wife's family, (4) (male) friendships and leisure time activities, (5) employment history, (6) five hypothetical parenting scenarios, (7) demographic background. The topic of unemployment was deliberately addressed toward the end of the interview to prevent it from dominating other areas of the interview.

The audio material was first reviewed for any non-anonymous component and the relevant passages were removed. They were then transcribed using the AI transcription software "Transkriptor". The finished transcripts underwent extensive linguistic editing. Both the original Turkish transcripts and the English transcripts, translated with the AI translation and writing assistant "DeepL", were used for interpretation.

The interpretative approach is based on the documentary method ([Bohnsack et al., 2010](#)) and relational hermeneutics ([Straub & Ruppel, 2024](#)). The foundational principles of this sociological interpretative method are rooted in Garfinkel's ethnomethodological "documentary method" and in Mannheim's conceptualisation of a distinction between communicative and conjunctive knowledge ([Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2008](#)). The method comprises two sequential steps: Firstly, the content of the original text is paraphrased in the words of the interpreter (formulating interpretation). Secondly, the underlying meaning of the text is reconstructed. In the subsequent process, interpreters seek to identify fundamental assumptions and messages that are taken for granted and which underpin the actual statement, or the framework – the manner in which a topic is addressed (reflective interpretation). The documentary method therefore reconstructs the implicit knowledge that underlies everyday practice ([Bohnsack et al., 2010](#)). This underlying pattern of meaning is termed a framework of orientation. These frameworks are then used to facilitate a comparative analysis of cases, with the objective of either identifying the presence of a similar framework in other interviews (which frequently exhibit slight variations) or discerning a different type of orientation.

Relational hermeneutics ([Straub & Ruppel, 2024](#)) is a further development of the documentary method for cultural comparison, with a focus on methodologically controlled comparison. Comparisons are made within individual interviews, between different interviews, and across interviews conducted in different countries. In addition, the different cultural backgrounds of the interpreting team are explicitly taken into account, allowing a richer interpretation. Emotional responses of the interpreters to the interview material are also reflexively incorporated into the evaluation. For this study, a cross-cultural team of seven sociologists and psychologists interpreted and analysed the

interviews, preparing a vignette for each interview. These interpretation sessions provided a forum for developing in-depth readings and discussing and exchanging diverse cultural perspectives. The interpretation focused on the following six themes: (a) the tone of the narrative and the mental state of the participants, (b) attitudes towards work, (c) institutions/government, (d) family involvement, (e) parenting, and (f) gender.

Results

Tone of the Narrative/Mental State of the Participants

The research literature clearly concludes that unemployment has a negative impact on well-being (e.g., Carroll, 2007; Rao, 2017). In our study, just over half of the participants expressed a negative tone in the interviews. However, almost the other half had a more positive tone. For example, one father responded in a cheerful tone when asked whether he would have done anything differently as a father: “No, I’m glad I did everything. We are both happy, both my children and my family are happy with me. So, desire and happiness go together” (DE28_Nov23).

The interviews with a negative tone can be further differentiated. In three of them, the interviewees present themselves as pensioners, although they are in their forties and have not actually retired. They consider their working life to be behind them and that they have already fulfilled their obligations, making the prospect of seeking employment seem remote. There is also a description of their own bodies as “worn out” and exhausted, accompanied by a tendency to withdraw: “I’m always at home, taking care of the house. I have animals. For example, we have a cat at home. I keep pigeons on the roof of the house. I take care of them; I don’t go anywhere. I cannot do anything.” (TR24_Mar24). In three interviews, a more general narrative of decline is also described. In addition to the narrative of one’s own diminishing strength, some interviewees speak of a broader deterioration in social conditions that surfaces across various themes. “[...] there used to be a quality called German quality, when they did something, they did it exactly, they thought long term (...) now they don’t have that (...) now everything is getting worse (...) there is no German quality anymore” (DE2_Mar23). In five of the interviews, a slightly angry but restrained tone emerges. The interviewees express a latent anger about their living environment and disappointment in their own lives. Finally, in five interviews, a passive stance can be observed. The interviewees’ own lives, not only their work but often also their family circumstances, are portrayed as outcomes of other people’s decisions, over which they had little control.

In contrast, eight interviewees talk about their life situation in a generally positive and accepting tone. In four of these interviews, the positive tone has strong religious connotations (two of them also adopt a didactic attitude towards religious life) or is explicitly tied to a religious way of life: “This place [mosque] is everything for us. Believe me, I can tell you honestly, for example, some people go to “discos” here and there, but our everything is here. This environment. Our hodja (imam) is here. We do our noon prayer, we sit and talk, we have a great tea and dinner together. It’s such a family atmosphere, we sit and eat together. Then our hodja chats with us. We laugh with our friends, I don’t know, we have such a nice atmosphere. For example, how can I put it, Alhamdulillah,

may Allah grant it to everyone.” (DE28_Nov23). This stands in clear contrast to the more playful, youthful tone in two interviews, where the interviewees do not seem to take their unemployment too seriously: When asked how their life had changed since leaving their previous job, the interviewee replied in a light-hearted manner: “What about life... I mean, since I don’t take work too seriously, I end up having fun. I mean, when I say fun, I don’t mean fun in the sense of, well, not completely detached fun. I look for pleasure in my work. You know, maybe it’s because I don’t have a financial commitment. Because my wife works. [...] I mean, I like being with people, being in a group... Working, not necessarily in a closed office, sitting in a place, in a process, in a strict discipline there [...] If I feel that, I don’t do the job anyway [...], I’m out.” (DE32_Feb24). In addition, one interviewee seems to ignore the fact that he is unemployed and becomes slightly irritated when asked how he feels about it. No differences were observed between the interviewees in Germany and Türkiye in terms of interview tone.

Attitude Towards Work

The tone of each interview and the narrative are directly related to the interviewees’ work experiences and attitudes toward work and employment. Seven respondents feel that they have been treated unfairly at work. Six interviewees consider themselves overqualified for the job they lost and do not expect to find a position that matches their qualifications. One respondent has a strong personal commitment to work and is therefore very negatively affected by being unemployed, and is eager to find a new position. Ten other respondents show no ambition or expectation regarding work, either in the past or in the future. Four interviewees believe that with their limited education and lack of qualification (completing primary school in Türkiye, or a Hauptschulabschluss/secondary school leaving certificate in Germany, with no formal training) they do not expect to find any work. Two interviewees show a clearly different orientation when they express that they quickly get bored at work and therefore do not stay in a job (see interview quotes above/DE32_Feb24). These two, as well as some of the interviewees who do not see themselves as qualified or who do not expect anything from work, show a positive attitude towards their lives. On the contrary, feeling overqualified and unfairly treated creates a more negative tone. The experience of unemployment appears to be shaped by the discrepancy between a person’s current situation and their expectations of employment. For other interviewees, work seems to have never been a central part of an individual’s self-identity. For some of these fathers, being unemployed is not seen as a significant threat. Moreover, many of them completed only primary school in Türkiye, then migrated to Germany (or completed secondary school in Germany), and started working in low-wage jobs as children or teenagers. From their perspective, they have already spent much of their lives working. Furthermore, the subgroup of fathers who experience this as neutral or positive mainly live in Germany (8 out of 10), and it is the receipt of social support that allows them to maintain their social status as the breadwinner in the family despite not earning any money. For example, one father expresses his pride in his life and underlines his respected position in the family: “Many people envied me, saying, ‘How do you do it? Everyone is so happy. Where are you taking it? You’re feeding an army. [...] I have many nieces and nephews. 20-30 people come on weekends.” (DE25_Oct23)

The same man continues when asked about his wife's job: "She cleaned in a company here, in the post office. Then I said, 'Neither she nor I work. God provides'. (DE25_Oct23) The two fathers in Türkiye who show little work ambition are subjectively in a much more negative situation, often struggling with poverty without much prospect of getting out of it. This father reports that he became a parent at the age of 22. When asked about his life circumstances at that time, he replied: "Let me put it this way, financially.... I never had a lot of money. I mean, I was always in debt. I was always in debt. I tried to pay, I couldn't. It happened, it didn't happen; it ended, it didn't end. I've always had a life like that. Just when you get a job... just when things are getting better, the job ends." (TR3_Mar23).

Institutions/Government

The institutional integration of the unemployed is quite distinct in Germany and Türkiye. In Germany, all fathers interviewed receive either unemployment benefits or a basic income. In most cases, the family income is supplemented by the mother's basic income or unemployment benefit, and they also receive social benefits for their children. In addition, there are counselling services for the unemployed or people in difficult life situations, which are used by some of the interviewees. In a few cases, families are also supported by the Youth Welfare Office.

Since unemployment allowance in Türkiye is only valid for insured and registered employees, does not exceed 300 days and covers a wage below the minimum wage, the fathers we interviewed in Türkiye emphasized the inadequacy of unemployment allowance and institutional support in general. The reasons fathers in Türkiye find the institutions, particularly unemployment benefits, inadequate differ between those uneducated or low educated and skilled and those educated and medium or highly skilled. Interviewees working in low skill positions generally say that they are not eligible for unemployment benefits because they work without insurance coverage as unregistered workers. Some also say that their right to these benefits was blocked by their employers through irregular employment practices, such as temporary contracts or constant short-term employment. On the other hand, interviewees with medium or high education levels indicate that both the amount (lower than minimum wage) and duration (less than 10 months) of their unemployment benefits are insufficient relative to their previous work arrangements. Participants' accounts reveal that the amount of unemployment benefits provided in Türkiye, as well as the conditions required to receive them, fall short of meeting the needs and priorities of different educational and income groups.

Accordingly, the comments on the government or public institutions are quite different in the interviews conducted in Germany and Türkiye. In Germany, most unemployed fathers appreciate the financial, social, and educational support offered. Although some mention that their financial possibilities are limited, they are grateful that they have enough to live on. It is clear from the interviews that the respondents are reasonably satisfied with the support they have received. However, it is also clear that if they have few qualifications, it is hardly worthwhile to go back to work. Only one interviewee is disappointed with the education system in Germany and another one expresses disappointment with the welfare system: "The only strange thing is that Germany is a social

state [...] but everyone is unhappy because it has stopped being a social state, it doesn't treat everyone equally anymore, from abroad, non-German foreigners are really treated as second-third class" (DE2_Mar23). However, the same father also describes, earlier in the interview, that social welfare takes away the psychological burden of unemployment: "If I compare it with Türkiye [...] it (the unemployment) doesn't disturb my psychology. Many people in Türkiye, many fathers psychologically suffered because of this [not being able to provide for their family]". (DE2_Mar23) In Türkiye, three interviewees strongly criticized the government (one of whom was in prison for political reasons) and four articulated their disappointment with institutions in Türkiye. This is one example: "Over there [in Germany], they pay a certain amount per child. Here, they charge us a certain amount per child. I mean, they don't give it to us—they take it (sarcastically). All they say is "Have three kids." Okay, have three—but how? For example, when a child is born, they give me a 300 Turkish Lira breastfeeding allowance at first. And that's it. Then they say, 'You have a fridge, a washing machine, a dishwasher.' Sure, but those need detergent. They consume electricity, water. You have to fill the fridge. So how are you supposed to do all that? There's no support for that." (TR26_Aug24) Several interviewees make it clear that they do not expect any support from the government in their situation. As will be exemplified in the next section, the financial gap in the case of unemployment in Türkiye is often compensated by direct and indirect (e.g. living in the same house or pooling resources) financial support from the family. Extended family members, especially the father's or the spouse's parents, serve as a significant source of daily caregiving and childcare support, particularly for lower-class families in Türkiye. When it comes to financial support, it is usually the father or father-in-law who provides help, while for childcare, the maternal or paternal grandmother often takes the lead.

(Extended) Family Involvement

We identified two different patterns of family involvement in our sample. In the first pattern (6 respondents), the family lives together as an extended family with strong intra-family ties, hierarchies, and traditions. Half of the cases are from Türkiye and half from Germany. All of these interviewees married very young, probably in an arranged marriage, and had children at an early age. In Türkiye, sharing a household with the extended family offers partial protection from poverty. At the same time, however, the strict family structure prevents them from taking up work. Several fathers report that their elders pushed them into marriage before they could establish a career or have the opportunity to find a real job: "We graduated from that department and came here. Of course, there are no jobs immediately after graduation. We searched, we scanned, we applied, but of course we were unemployed. At that time, after graduation, we got married. At the moment we work when we can find daily wages, we try to work, but otherwise we are unemployed". (TR2_Mar23) In Germany, the financial dependence is less pronounced, in some cases the unemployed father even supports other relatives. In all cases, unemployment is quite common in the whole extended family, which also normalizes it (at least to some extent). In contrast to the cases in Türkiye, some of the fathers in Germany who had to marry early have since divorced and remarried.

In the second family pattern, respondents (12) report strong ties within the nuclear family but distance from their parents or parents-in-law. The distance stems not only from physical separation and emotional estrangement due to differing value systems, but also from anxiety about disapproval or criticism related to unemployment. Three interviewees in Germany (and also three cases in Türkiye) describe being separated from their extended family living in Türkiye (or far away) because they (or their relatives) cannot afford to travel. In some cases (3), this distance is due to religious differences, either in the level of religiosity or affiliation with different sects. In other cases, unemployment itself seems to have caused respondents to distance themselves from their families in order to avoid being criticized for not working.

Two fathers in Germany live as single fathers, one with four children at home after a divorce and another as a widow with one minor and three adult children. In both cases, there is no extended family, and they receive extensive support from the government and health institutions.

In addition, two interviewees from Germany describe their mosque community as their new “chosen family,” with whom they share common moral values and everyday practices, while also forming important support networks.

Parenting

Attitudes towards parenthood are very diverse and will be presented below as different aspects that do not necessarily exclude each other. For the sake of clarity and comprehensiveness, we present the approaches in a range from minimal involvement to a more active fathering role, and as an extended list.

Not significantly involved: A total of eight fathers describe themselves as not being very involved in their children’s lives. Although the reasons for non-involvement vary, the main reason cited is their strong presence in public life and the time they devote to socializing with male kin members and friends.

Insufficient: Half of the fathers feel inadequate as parents, mainly due to financial difficulties and their inability to provide a better life (or better opportunities, such as paying for tutoring) for their children. One father articulates this sentiment with drastic words: “It’s a very bad feeling... because you are in charge. You have all their needs. You have to provide... From A to Z. From school allowance, from going out with their friends after school... I don’t know? Shoes, socks, pants... The food he’s going to eat in the evening... everything. So it’s a very bad feeling. I never... I never liked being a father. (TR3_Mar23) Some fathers also express reservations about their parenting skills in relation to education (“I don’t know, something I think I could have done better, maybe if I had read more books to the children when they were young. DE9_Mar23) or their relationship with their children (“I wish I had spent a little bit more time with them from the beginning and spent a little bit more time to understand them and to understand them a little bit more, how can I put it?” (DE3_Mar23_)). This father repeats his inability to understand the children ten times in the interview, thereby indicating an inherent insecurity and an additional inability to articulate his difficulties verbally (“how can I put it?”).

Authoritarian: Five fathers (two in Germany, three in Türkiye) approach their children in a more authoritarian way highlighting the importance of clear rules and respect.

Father as friend: Six fathers are striving to be their children's friend, often contrasting this with their own fathers: "I mean, there was no joking around with my father. Personally, I think I overcame this with my children because it's really nice to go places together and do things, you know, to be a classic friend." (DE32_Feb24) Two additional fathers mention that they are very laid-back in parenting, for example, not wanting to do homework with their children.

Life teacher: A fairly large group in the sample (8) position themselves as "life teachers" - for whom it is important not to overemphasize formal education, but rather to pass on the lessons they have learned throughout their lives (in the school of life "hayat okulu"): "The purpose of fathers is to show a way. Or even two ways. Whichever is better for them, as I said, be a roof and give them your protective shade there. Don't let them get wet in the rain, let them walk comfortably."

(DE32_Feb24) Another example: "For example, I like to talk a lot with my child, for example, we like to look at the sky from the balcony. We used to put my children on their backs and talk to them while looking at the sky." (TR18_Sep23)

Proud father: For seven fathers, their kids are a source of pride, something particularly important during times of unemployment. Some mention outstanding achievements at school or in sports. Sometimes this is described simply as a positive aspect of their lives, sometimes it is more clearly framed as something that reflects positively on them as fathers, such as this father who later compares his daughter's IQ with his own: "I'm always proud of her. I'll tell her that to her face. Because my eldest daughter is a very lucky girl. When she was two, she could already use a computer. Imagine a child with such a high IQ." (TR30_Aug24)

Psychologized, intensive parenting: Five fathers approach parenting in a way that has been sociologically labelled as "intensive parenting" (i.e., Faircloth, 2023). This involves in-depth reflections on the development of their child/children and their responsibilities as a parent to psychologically support their children as much as possible. Most of them hold university degrees themselves. In one case, this is accompanied by a phenomenon called "maternal gatekeeping" – although it is the father who takes care of the child most of the time, it is the mother, a medical doctor, who expresses her high demands in how he should spend time with the child.

Furthermore, schooling is discussed in most of the interviews. However, the interviews do not reflect a strong belief in the value of education. Only a few fathers mentioned that school education and achievement are necessary paths to a better future for their children. Some other fathers do not seem to be very interested in what their children are doing in school. Others even doubt that schooling today is good enough or can lead to a good future: "A university graduate ends up mopping floors at A101 or ŞOK (low-cost chain supermarkets)" (TR26_Aug24). These doubts are sometimes based on their own experience of having a university degree and still being unemployed. Overall, fathers have an ambivalent attitude towards school: "I want them to be good people with

good morals, but it can be a school somehow, I mean, for example, for my son, when he says to me, Dad, I don't want to do many things. I mean, what can I say? I don't want to be a lawyer or a doctor. Okay, son. It doesn't matter." (TR24_Mar24).

Gender

One of the aims of this study was to find out to what extent unemployed fathers take on roles traditionally assigned to women (e.g., childcare) when they are unemployed. However, this question is more difficult to answer than expected based on the interview material. Many fathers were vague about how much responsibility they took on at home. In six cases, the fathers interviewed convincingly described themselves as bearing the main burden of childcare and household chores: "Anyway, because of my wife, since my wife is working, I take care of the children since I am at home during this time. You know, school, homework. So it's a bit like things are reversed now. If I stay at home and my wife has to go out, what happens? I have to take care of the work at home. That's the way it is now." (TR24_Mar24) The fathers who are taking over are either single fathers or their wives work full-time, so they have to step in. Four of them approve of their new role and get satisfaction from it. They are doing better mentally than their counterparts. One father makes it clear that he doesn't like the new division of labour.

On the contrary, two fathers explicitly state that they do not engage in any particular activity: "I'm kind of a laid-back guy. I mean really relaxed. I mean responsibility, like I say, I gave all the responsibility in the house to my wife, to you... You are the queen of the house..." (DE32_Feb24). While this father presents his non-responsibility with a playful attitude and acts like a "cool guy", the second father seems in general to be very inactive and restrained in his attitude. He simply says "Well, 95% of the responsibility lies with my wife and 5% with me." (DE32_Feb24) This inactivity is associated with the feeling of shame expressed in the following: "When you are unemployed, I'm not me. [...] you become dull. I mean, it's huge... You're ashamed to even ask your wife for water at home. You say I'm an unnecessary person. The depression is too much. As a man, as a father, as a husband, they say your first duty is to bring money." (DE32_Feb24) Another respondent adds to this, attributing his inactivity to his psychological problems with unemployment: "Things changed a bit during my unemployment. My wife was the one who brought home the money. Due to my lack of money at work, I do some general work such as washing the dishes, tidying up the house, etc., but the general cleaning and detailed cleaning is still on my wife. And it tires me a lot. Yes, I have to do it, I have to help, but because I feel psychologically tired, I don't feel like doing it. [...] It's usually my wife who prepares the food. If she is also the breadwinner, the entire burden of work for the family falls on her shoulders". (TR23_Jan24).

For the remaining 13 interviews, it is difficult to assess their contribution to the household. At least eight of them clearly articulate that fathers should be the breadwinners: "The wife takes care of the house. And I try to take care of things outside. That's the way it is. I mean, it's the same for everybody else as it is for us. The wife is inside and I'm outside. (DE28_Nov23). As already mentioned, the fathers in Germany feel that they fulfil their role as breadwinners at least to some extent (e.g. they describe how they bring

food home) through social benefits. However, their counterparts in Türkiye perceive a failure to adequately fulfil their primary role in the family.

Some fathers reported that they were expected by their wives to contribute more to the household and childcare due to their unemployment experience, and some even reported that even if they did, their wives did not find this sufficient. Failure to meet gender role expectations not only causes negative feelings for fathers, but also negatively affects the relationship between spouses. Fathers who have such experiences see their wives as “impossible to please”. A total of eight fathers, mainly from Türkiye, say that they do not meet their wives’ expectations and that this causes marital conflict: “A: She doesn’t like anything I do. B: Nothing? A: No. B: And that is why? A: Because I don’t work. She doesn’t like anything I do because I don’t bring money.” (DE26_Oct23) Another person frames it in a more general way, including his own (un)happiness: “I mean, even though they say there is no happiness in marriage, they say there is no happiness with money, but yes, there is happiness with money. Because you are peaceful.” (TR23_Jan24) In another interview, there is an aggressive undertone and a general resentment of women, underscored by the slightly sarcastic laughter: “Women (laughs) usually never run out of demands. Something for sure... I mean, if it were up to us, we usually expect... something... the expectation never ends. I mean men... if you ask us, we expect something too, according to them, but... What can it be? It’s like taking on a burden. I mean, marriage is the art of carrying a burden. That’s probably what the woman wants: to lighten her load, to make her more comfortable. That’s usually the goal anyway. That’s what women usually want. And also comfortable... she wants to be comfortable.” (TR6_May23) Two respondents mention that they clearly do not meet their wives’ expectations, but that their wives do not talk about it out of respect. This attitude is seen as a helpful way to stabilize the marriage: “No one should be tested beyond their strength. If they’re tested, it’s difficult, I mean, it’s difficult in every way. You have a certain capacity. If [your wife] asks you to do something beyond your capacity... I mean, the lady of the house should know the capacity of the man of the house. If she asks for something beyond that, there will definitely be problems, there will definitely be coercion, and it will definitely end in separation, I mean really, because everybody has a certain patience.” (TR2_Mar23).

These examples show that male unemployment combined with traditional gender ideals can lead to family and marital conflict and leave fathers feeling inadequate. In our sample, however, we also see traditionally oriented unemployed fathers who fare better. One group shifts their identity from earning money to striving for a religious ideal of life. The adoption of a “non-worldly” identity, whether it pertains to religious affiliation or spiritual practice, can serve as a coping mechanism to manage the adverse effects of adverse experiences with “worldly” consequences, such as unemployment. For example, when asked to introduce themselves at the beginning of the interview, most fathers focused on their age, occupation, and number of children. This father begins by characterizing himself as a moral person: “My name is * [...] I’ve lived a lot, seen a lot, good and bad. I try to help as much as I can, no matter who it is. I also try to keep my promises as much as possible. Because I know that when a promise is made, it must be kept. I have not strayed from the path of truth. I hope to continue my life in this way. I don’t have anything else. If I can straighten my colt a little, I have nothing else to ask of Allah.”

(DE33_Mar24) Others present themselves as “village elders” or “wise men” who do not work but are respected for their wisdom. Some of these fathers see themselves more explicitly as life teachers, also of their children and their wives, including convincing them of a religious way of life: “When we got married, she didn’t even know how to pray. I taught her how to pray, for example” (TR24_Mar24) Some of the religious fathers are very community oriented, others practice their religiosity in their private space (mainly by praying, but also for example by keeping pigeons which is framed as a sacred activity).

Four fathers make their ideal of gender equality very clear in the interview. It is important to emphasise that they differ greatly from one another in other respects. One appreciates the fact that his wife works and emphasizes the sharing of burdens: “At first I had a hard time because I was working alone, which inevitably causes stress at home. The easy part is that after my wife started working, I realized the ease of marriage. It was very good in terms of financial and moral support. So she is working now. So it is good. It was difficult at the beginning, but now it is nice.” (DE29_Nov23) Nevertheless, he doesn’t do much housework and childcare. Another father strongly presents himself as a religious and conservative person, but at the same time, makes it clear that he meets his wife at eye level and that they are like companions. The third father, who emphasizes equality, was born in Germany and takes care of their young children while his wife works full-time. Interestingly, he seems to take equality for granted and does not make a big deal out of it, even though they have reversed traditional gender roles in the family.

We finish this result section with an attempt to develop a typology of masculinity for unemployed Turkish fathers that summarizes the findings presented above. The typology thus incorporates the themes described above (mood and mental state, attitudes toward work, institutions, family involvement, parenting, and gender). In total, we identified four different types of masculinity (Table 2). Due to the sample size, this typology does not claim to be exhaustive.

To illustrate this typology, we present an exemplary case for each type. However, this cannot fully capture the wide range of experiences that fathers within a given type may have and should not be taken as a comprehensive description of the type.

Disappointed Masculinity. DE26_Oct23 is a 35-year-old former metalworker in Germany. He lives with his two teenage children and his wife, who is also unemployed. Both have a low level of education. The discrepancy between his current situation and his own expectations—as well as the expectations others have of him—shapes the entire interview. He views his role as a parent primarily as fulfilling the role of breadwinner—and he is failing to live up to it. He describes how his wife views him very negatively because he does not earn money (see quote above “She doesn’t like anything I do because I don’t bring money.”). He regrets many decisions in his life, but especially that he married and had children very early (at age 18). He repeatedly warns the interviewer against making such mistakes.

Religious Masculinity. TR24_Mar24 is 41 years old and has been unemployed for about a year. His wife works as an elementary school teacher. They have two children. At the beginning of the interview, he describes his professional career in detail and the various

Table 2. Typology of Gendered Negotiations of Unemployment

Masculinity type	Work values	Life orientation/Moral values	Social and family role/ Parenting approach
Disappointed masculinity	Endorses traditional work roles and high work ethic; conflict with unemployment	Feels inactive and lacking in purpose due to inability to engage in meaningful new roles	Relies on extended family hierarchy; decision-making delegated to older male relatives; marital conflicts frequently reported
Religious masculinity	Low work orientation, not central to identity; work ethic guided by religious principles	Shifts from material success to moral/religious values	Values strong familial roles; involvement varies between private spirituality and religious community participation
Playful masculinity	Minimal work commitment; sees work as non-essential or delegated to spouse	Embraces a youthful or non-responsible lifestyle	Embedded in informal, playful communities; fatherhood or caregiving often peripheral
Stay-at-home father masculinity	Reverses traditional roles; caregiving becomes primary occupation, often out of necessity	Finds meaning and self-worth in caregiving and emotional involvement	Fatherhood is central to identity; nurturance and emotional availability are key sources of self-value

jobs he has held. It becomes clear that he is disappointed and disillusioned because, despite his good education, he does not have a job. So it exhibits characteristics of the first type. But as the interview progresses, the tone shifts toward a more positive outlook. The interviewee makes it clear that he is turning more and more to religious values and away from materialistic orientations (for example, he prefers visiting a lake over a shopping mall with his children). He describes his relationship with his wife and children as positive, but also marked by a sense of seriousness. He sees himself as the one in the family who can instill religious values and practices (“When we got married, she didn’t even know how to pray. I taught her how to pray, for example. I’m not a person who prays five times a day. But I research, read, follow as much as I can”).

Playful Masculinity. DE32_Feb24 is 51 years old, has held various jobs, and has been unemployed for several months now. His wife works as a nurse. While he travels back and forth between Turkey and Germany, his family lives in Turkey. He makes it clear that having fun is his top priority. He especially enjoys spending time with his friends at barbecues and volunteers as a chess coach. He admits, with a cheerful attitude, that his wife does everything (work, housework, taking care of the children) as cited above (“I’m kind of a laid-back guy. [...] I gave all the responsibility in the house to my wife”). As a father, he sees himself as the one who does things that are active and fun.

Stay-At-Home Masculinity. TR5_May23 is 39 years old and used to work as an electrician. He has been unemployed for a year. They have two children. He explains that his wife works full-time and he takes on almost all the household chores and childcare responsibilities (“I’m always in the lead when it comes to household stuff, things to be done, things related to the children”). He is proud of his children and makes it clear that he takes his parental duties very seriously (“I don’t have time to go to cafes. I mean, I have no time, believe me”). It is important to him that his wife treats him with respect and accepts his opinion. Overall, he seems to have accepted his life situation.

Discussion

This study shows that there are major differences in how people cope with unemployment and construct their identity as fathers. If subjective well-being is taken as a criterion, then it is possible to distinguish between different ways of overcoming unemployment as a crisis of fatherhood or masculine identity. The most vulnerable type is the “disappointed masculinity”; individuals who experience their current life situation as a stark deviation from their ideals and see little room to develop in other areas of life. In contrast, the situation is experienced more positively by those who approach it with a playful attitude, adopt an alternative value system of a religious lifestyle, or take on an active father role. In all three cases, a strong work identity was either never present or has been replaced by new forms of identity. Interestingly, the interviews with fathers who have replaced their father-as-breadwinner identity were the richest, sometimes highly detailed, in terms of the material they were willing to share. Many were eager to explain their situation, with a sense of contributing to science serving as a motivation. Their narratives reflected a desire to pass on their ideals: through forms of “teaching” (religious masculinity), pride in their laid-back personalities (playful masculinity), or a sense of fulfilment in sharing family responsibilities (stay-at-home father masculinity). The interview material for this study proved to be very suitable for interpreting the interviewees’ orientations, as well as the ambivalences present in between. Overall, these findings suggest that the negotiation of masculinity and fatherhood in times of unemployment is not a uniform process but one shaped by cultural resources, moral frameworks, relational contexts, and individual background. The coexistence of traditional and alternative masculine orientations reveals that unemployment can function both as a site of vulnerability and as a potential turning point for renegotiating gendered subjectivities. In this sense, fatherhood emerges not only as a domain of loss and constraint but also as a space for agency, reflection and re-definition of what it means to be a man in changing social and economic conditions.

Distinguishing and evaluating the four masculinity types becomes more difficult when the subjective well-being of the fathers is not used as the criterion, but rather that of their wives, children, or the entire family is taken into account. Without also conducting supplementary interviews, it remains unclear in many cases how the coping strategies (or lack thereof) affect those involved. Looking at the situation from the outside, developing a “stay-at-home father” identity seems to be the most constructive outcome for the entire family. However, we do not know how willing the women are (if such gender ideals apply to them) to give up or share their role as housewives and primary caretakers, and how they feel about taking on the role of main provider (in the cases where they work). When a

strong religious identity is developed, it seems to go hand in hand with overall life satisfaction and harmony from the perspective of fathers. However, many of the interviewees describe these religious practices as being practiced by themselves or as part of a male community. Some see themselves as teachers of their wives. To what extent their female partners are part of these practices and how they experience them would be very interesting to find out in future studies. It would be particularly insightful to hear the wives' perspectives in cases of "playful masculinity", where the women are entirely responsible for both paid and unpaid work. The question arises as to whether and how they deal with the dominance they gain in the family as a result, but also how they view their husband. Future research should foreground these questions to obtain a family-level picture of what coping with unemployment entails.

From a governmental perspective, the perspective and goal are twofold: to support people in coping with unemployment in a positive way (to prevent mental health issues and related problems), and to encourage them to take initiative in re-entering the labour market. This is particularly an issue in Germany, where social support for the unemployed comes at a financial cost to the state. This reveals a tension, because the fathers who construct an alternative identity – whether through religion or active fatherhood – may become less available to the labour market. Surprisingly, several of the fathers interviewed have accepted their unemployment as a long-term condition, despite the aforementioned literature showing how much fathers suffer from not fulfilling their breadwinner role. In this regard, there are significant differences between the places of residence: in Türkiye, those who adopt this mindset are primarily fathers who either receive a great deal of financial support from their extended families or whose wives who are employed. Without both factors, their economic situation would likely be too precarious. In Germany, fathers who or whose entire family receive a citizen's income on a permanent basis are also able to maintain a relatively good standard of living. Therefore, the main difference between Turkish fathers in Germany and those in Türkiye was found to be a consequence of financial support: In Germany, unemployed fathers manage to make ends meet even without strong family support, which leads some (not all) of them to no longer consider employment a central part of their identity or future plans. From Aboim's (2016) perspective of *plural masculinities*, these diverse orientations illustrate how men draw upon multiple, sometimes contradictory, cultural repertoires to sustain or transform their masculine selves. The findings thus reinforce the view that masculinity is not a fixed essence but a dynamic and contextually negotiated practice, continuously reshaped through men's interactions with family, work, and moral value systems. In contrast, no systematic differences in masculinity types were observed between fathers residing in Germany and those in Türkiye, instead, pronounced interindividual variations emerged within both groups.

Fathers with strong religious orientations, with traditional family structures, with egalitarian values, with both high and low work ethics were found in equal measure in both countries. The ways in which parenthood was defined also varied greatly between fathers, but not between the places of residence, indicating a strong cultural connection between Turkish communities in both countries. Interestingly, the four types of masculinity identified in the current study cannot be clearly assigned to different socioeconomic milieus either. In all four types, there are both people with a university degree

and primary school graduates (Türkiye) or graduates with an intermediate school leaving certificate (Germany).

In fact, negotiations of unemployment, identity, and masculinity types appear to be strongly related to factors within the family (both the family of origin and the current family), such as the assignment of values to work, the employment of women, or one's own position in the family hierarchy. Cultural or neighbourhood factors are presumably more relevant to the formation of a religious identity, such as the significantly increased presence of religiosity among Muslims both in Türkiye and Germany. In fact, family factors seem to play a less important role here, as many interviewees report that they distance themselves from their own family or in-laws because of their religiosity. Beyond that, individual factors such as the health of the interviewee, their overall attitude (positive or negative), and their ambition certainly play an important role. From a gendered perspective, these variations reflect ongoing negotiations between traditional and emerging masculinities. Drawing on [Aboim's \(2016\)](#) framework of plural masculinities, the findings demonstrate that men's responses to unemployment are shaped by their capacity to move within and between different masculine repertoires—ranging from provider ideals to caring, spiritual, or playful selves.

Supporting fathers, therefore, requires recognising these plural and relational constructions of masculinity and designing interventions that address the cultural meanings, emotional investments, and power dynamics embedded in men's everyday negotiations of gender and fatherhood. Stay-at-home fathers tend to report comparatively high level of life satisfaction. However, their return to the labour market is often complicated by the fact that their families have reorganised everyday life around their caregiving role, making additional structural support, such as access to affordable childcare, essential. For disappointed fathers, however, psychological and social support may be more appropriate, both to improve their mental well-being and to restore motivation for re-employment. At the same time, it may be helpful for them to be made aware of alternative fulfilling tasks, such as caring for their own children. In addition, supporting them to recognise alternative, meaningful roles, such as caregiving or contributing to family life in non-material ways, may also help to buffer the loss of the breadwinner identity. Fathers with a playful or religiously grounded orientation appear to be the most difficult to reach through employment policies, as they tend to experience contentment and little desire to alter their situation. In these cases, support might more effectively target the family system, including mothers and children. Additionally, these two groups of fathers are probably best reached through friendship networks and religious communities. These reflections on support systems should be subject to further research. It is particularly important to include women's and children's perspectives into these considerations.

Furthermore, a larger study, including quantitative data, is needed to examine individual, family, community, cultural, and country-level factors systematically to predict the emergence of different masculinity types. As a qualitative study, however, the present work vividly shows how people in comparable life situations adopt and also modify very different cultural systems of meaning. This also demonstrates the adaptability of fatherhood in a time in which there is not just one right way to be a father.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Elif Karadeniz, Ronahi Yener, and Pınar Karan for conducting several interviews.

ORCID iDs

Anna Sieben  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0203-2076>

Umut Beşpınar  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5292-5713>

Zeynep Beşpınar  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0378-7959>

Ladin Gürdal  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3028-0296>

Zeynep Kapisız  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7500-5031>

Öznur Uşaklılar  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9063-7643>

Ezel Üsten  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2250-4245>

Author Contributions

All authors were equally involved in the analysis of the data. The interviews were conducted by Umut Beşpınar, Zeynep Beşpınar, Ladin Gürdal, Zeynep Kapisız, Nebi Sümer, Öznur Uşaklılar, Ezel Üsten. The first draft of the article was written by Anna Sieben. All authors were involved in revising the article. The grant application was submitted by Anna Sieben, Umut Beşpınar, Zeynep Beşpınar, Zeynep Kapisız, Nebi Sümer. Umut Beşpınar, Zeynep Beşpınar, Ladin Gürdal, Anna Sieben, Nebi Sümer, Öznur Uşaklılar were responsible for the administration of the project.

Funding

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This research was supported by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (TÜBİTAK) under grant (2531-221N433) and by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) under grant (57740933).

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

References

- Aboim, S. (2016). *Plural masculinities: The remaking of the self in private life*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315600901>
- AÇEV. (2017). Involved fatherhood and its determinants in Turkey: Executive summary. https://www.acev.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/1_involved-fatherhood-and-its-determinants-in-turkey.pdf
- Aktürk, S. (2020). The Turkish minority in German politics: Trends, diversification of representation, and policy implications. *Insight Turkey*, 12(1), 65–80. <https://doi.org/10.25253/99.2020121.05>

- Bergnehr, D. (2022). Adapted fathering for new times: Refugee men's narratives on caring for home and children. *Journal of Family Studies*, 28(3), 934–949. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13229400.2020.1769708>
- Beşpınar, F. U. (2015). Between ideals and enactments: The experience of 'new fatherhood' among middle-class men in Turkey. In *Gender and sexuality in Muslim cultures* (pp. 95–114). Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- Beşpınar, F. U., & Beşpınar, L. Z. (2018). Türkiye’de orta üst sınıf laik ve muhafazakâr kimliklerin babalık deneyimleri üzerinden irdelenmesi: Benzerlikler, farklılıklar, önyargılar ve mesafeler. *Toplum ve Bilim*, 143, 5–43.
- Bohnsack, R., Pfaff, N., & Weller, W. (Eds.). (2010). Qualitative analysis and documentary method in international educational research. B.Budrich. <https://doi.org/10.3224/86649236>
- Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF). (2018). *Türkeistämmige personen in Deutschland (working paper Nr. 81, S. Schührer)*. https://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/Anlagen/DE/Forschung/WorkingPapers/wp81-tuerkeistaemmige-in-deutschland.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=12
- Carroll, N. (2007). Unemployment and psychological well-being. *The Economic Record*, 83(262), 287–302. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4932.2007.00415x>
- Castrillo, C., Rogero-García, J., Romero-Balsas, P., & Meil, G. (2021). Becoming primary caregivers? Unemployed fathers caring alone in Spain. *Families, Relationships and Societies*, 10(3), 517–533. <https://doi.org/10.1332/204674320X15919852635855>
- Faircloth, C. (2014). Intensive fatherhood? The (un)involved dad. In E. Lee, J. Bristow, C. Faircloth, & J. Macvarish (Eds.), *Parenting culture studies* (pp. 184–199). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137304612_9
- Faircloth, C. (2023). Intensive parenting and the expansion of parenting. In *Parenting culture studies* (pp. 33–67). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-35471-3_2
- Geisen, T., & Niermann, D. (2013). When sons become fathers –migration benefits and (new) fatherhood from an intergenerational perspective. In T. Geisen, T. Studer, & E. Yildiz (Eds.), *Migration, Familie und soziale Lage* (pp. 223–238). VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-94127-1_11
- Hennecke, J., & Pape, A. (2020). *Suddenly a stay-at-home dad? Short- and long-term consequences of fathers' job loss on time investment in the household*. (IZA Discussion Paper No. 13866). <https://www.iza.org/publications/dp/13866/suddenly-a-stay-at-home-dad-short-and-long-term-consequences-of-fathers-job-loss-on-time-investment-in-the-household>
- İŞKUR. (2025). İşsizlik ödeneği. <https://www.iskur.gov.tr/is-arayan/issizlik-sigortasi/issizlik-odeneği/>
- Komarovsky, M. (2004). *The unemployed man and his family: The effect of unemployment upon the status of the man in fifty-nine families*. Altamira Press.
- Labor Force Statistics (2024). <https://veriportali.tuik.gov.tr/en/press/53514>
- Legarreta-Iza, M., & Sagastizabal Emilio-Yus, M. (2023). 'If I had a job, i'd pay somebody to look after my child': The practices and discourses of Spanish fathers experiencing periods of unemployment. *Journal of Family Studies*, 29(5), 2228–2247. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13229400.2022.2158904>
- Merkle, T., & Wippermann, C. (2008). *Eltern unter druck: Selbstverständnisse, Befindlichkeiten und Bedürfnisse von Eltern in verschiedenen Lebenswelten*. Lucius.

- Miller, T. (2017). *Making sense of parenthood*. Cambridge University Press.
- Parke, R. D., & Cookston, J. T. (2021). Transnational fathers: New theoretical and conceptual challenges. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 13(3), 266–282. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12392>
- Przyborski, A., & Wohlrab-Sahr, M. (2008). *Qualitative Sozialforschung: Ein Arbeitsbuch*. Oldenbourg.
- Rao, A. H. (2017). Stand by your man: Wives' emotion work during men's unemployment. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 79(3), 636–656. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12385>
- Roy, K. M. (2004). You can't eat love: Constructing provider role expectations for low-income and working-class fathers. *Fathering*, 2(3), 253–276. <https://doi.org/10.3149/fth.0203.253>
- Roy, K. M. (2006). Fathers' stories: A life course examination of paternal identity among low-income African American men. *Journal of Family Issues*, 27(1), 31–54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X05275432>
- Schubert, K., & Klein, M. (2020). *Das Politiklexikon* (7., aktual. u. erw. Aufl). Dietz. Cited in: bpb (2020). Arbeitslosigkeit. <https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/lexika/politiklexikon/17098/arbeitslosigkeit/>
- Spohn, M. (2002). *Türkische Männer in Deutschland: Familie und Identität*. Transcript.
- Statista. (2020). Vereinbarkeit von familie und beruf. <https://de.statista.com/statistik/studie/id/62843/dokument/vereinbarkeit-von-familie-und-beruf/>
- Statista. (2025). Arbeitslosenquote Deutschland. <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Wirtschaft/Konjunkturindikatoren/Arbeitsmarkt/arb210a.html>
- Statistisches Bundesamt. (2025). Eltern in teilzeitarbeit. <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Arbeit/Arbeitsmarkt/Qualitaet-Arbeit/Dimension-3/eltern-teilzeitarbeit.html>
- Straub, J. (2002). Personal and collective identity: A conceptual analysis. In H. Frieze & A. Assmann (Eds.), *Identities: Time, difference, and boundaries* (pp. 56–76). Berghahn Books. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781782389804-006>
- Straub, J., & Ruppel, P. S. (2024). Relational hermeneutics: Theoretical-methodological systematizations of interpretative research. In U. Wolfradt, L. Allolio-Näcke, & P. S. Ruppel (Eds.), *Cultural psychology: An introduction* (pp. 139–153). Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden.
- Strier, R. (2014). Unemployment and fatherhood: Gender, culture and national context. *Gender, Work and Organization*, 21(5), 395–410. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12044>
- Tunç, M. (2011). Väter mit Migrationshintergrund. Neue Perspektiven jenseits der Vorurteile. In M. M. Jansen, M. Brückner, M. Göttert, & M. Schmidbauer (Eds.), *Neue väter hat das land?! (Polis Nr. 54/2011)* (pp. 68–84). Hessische Landeszentrale für politische Bildung.
- Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu (TÜİK). (2020). İlgücü istatistikleri. <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Isgucu-Istatistikleri-Eylul-2020-33793>
- Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu (TÜİK). (2025). <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Isgucu-Istatistikleri-2024-54059>
- Westerling, A. (2015). Reflexive fatherhood in everyday life: The case of Denmark. *Families, Relationships and Societies*, 4(2), 209–223. <https://doi.org/10.1332/204674315X14347065836218>
- Willott, S., & Griffin, C. (2004). Redundant men: Constraints on identity change. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 14(2), 53–69. <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.762>
- Witzel, A., & Reiter, H. (2012). *The problem-centered interview: Principles and practice*. Sage.

Author Biographies

Dr. Anna Sieben is a professor of social psychology in civil safety research at the University of Wuppertal, as well as being the head of a division at the Institute for Advanced Simulation at Forschungszentrum Jülich. She specialises in parenting, cultural comparisons and social interactions in large groups and crowd movement. She employs qualitative interview methods and quantitative tools.

Dr. Fatma Umut Beşpınar is a Professor of Sociology at Middle East Technical University, where she also serves as Chair of the Department of Gender and Women's Studies. She completed her undergraduate and graduate studies in Sociology at Middle East Technical University and earned her Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Texas at Austin. Her academic interests include family sociology, parenting, the transformation of the family, the sociology of gender, labor and work, and social policy.

Dr. Zeynep Beşpınar is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Marmara University. She received her MA in Social Psychology from Middle East Technical University and her PhD in Sociology from Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University. Her research focuses on gender and family sociology, particularly fatherhood, masculinities, motherhood, domestic and intimate partner violence, disaster processes, and gender inequalities. Drawing on critical sociological theories and qualitative methods, she examines how gendered power relations are produced, reproduced, and negotiated within families, institutions, and broader social contexts.

Ladin Gürdal is a clinical and social psychologist specializing in family dynamics, trauma, and systemic resilience. She holds an MSc in Social Psychology from Sabancı University and an MA in Clinical Psychology from Istanbul Bilgi University. Her research focuses on parenting practices, intergenerational child-rearing, and the systemic impacts of natural disasters.

Zeynep Kapisız is a PhD candidate in Psychology at the University of Wuppertal and a senior specialist in the research, monitoring and evaluation department at the AÇEV (Mother Child Education Foundation). Her research interests are parenting, autobiographical memory and its functions, as well as the well-being of disadvantaged children and families. She uses qualitative and quantitative methods to examine parental ethnotheories, child-rearing practices and parenting intervention programs in Türkiye.

Dr. Nebi Sümer is a professor of psychology at Sabancı University and Senior Scholar in Istanbul Policy Center. He received his PhD in social psychology from Kansas State University in 1996. His research interests include attachment dynamics and parenting behaviors across the lifespan, well-being, transportation safety and driver behavior, and effects of unemployment. He is a member of the Science Academy Association in Türkiye.

Öznur Uşaklılar is a PhD candidate in the Department of Sociology at Middle East Technical University, where she also holds an MSc in Gender and Women's Studies. Her research interests focus on the production and political economy of urban space, specifically exploring how individuals from diverse backgrounds access and navigate public spaces. Her work lies at the intersection of urban sociology, gender studies, and qualitative methodology.

Dr. Ezel Üsten is a postdoctoral researcher in crowd psychology at the Institute for Advanced Simulation - Civil Safety Research (IAS-7), Forschungszentrum Jülich. He received his PhD in Psychology from the University of Wuppertal. His research focuses on social behaviour, perception, social norms, and motivational processes as expressed by individuals and groups in crowds. Using experimental methods, including qualitative and quantitative approaches, as well as other methodologies (e.g., computational modeling), he investigates how social interactions shape collective dynamics.