

RAISING AND EDUCATING CHILDREN IN A ROMA FAMILY TO PRACTICE THEIR FAITH THROUGH ROMA CUSTOMS

ZUZANA BUDAYOVÁ

Faculty of Theology, The Catholic University in Ružomberok
Spišská Kapitula 12, 053 04 Spišské Podhradie, Slovak Republic

E-mail address: budayova@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6171-3384>

MARIE ROUBALOVÁ

Hussite Theological Faculty, Charles University in Prague
Pacovská 350/4, 140 00 Praha 4- Krč, Czech Republic

E-mail address: marie.roubalova@ccshpraha.cz

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1484-1524>

JOSÉ GARCIA MARTIN

Department of Sociology, Faculty of Political Sciences and Sociology
University of Granada,

Calle Rector López Argüeta s/n, 18001 Granada, Spain

E-mail address: jgarciamartin@ugr.es

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7401-0613>

HENRICH GREŽO

Department of Ecology and Environmental Sciences
Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra

Tr. A. Hlinku 1, 949 01 Nitra, Slovakia

E-mail address: hgrezo@ukf.sk

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6235-909X>

JULINDA CILINGIRI

Department of Psychology, Faculty of Education
University of Durrës „Aleksandër Moisiu“

Kampusi i Ri Universitar, Rr. Miquësia, Spitallë, 2001 Durrës, Albania

E-mail address: jcilingiri@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0180-3596>



ABSTRACT

Aim. The main aim of the paper is to highlight the education of children in Roma families to practice their faith through Roma customs. The authors identify the practice of faith in Roma holidays which are baptism, sacrament of Eucharist and Confirmation, funeral.

Methods. The authors use the literary-descriptive method which they use for analytical-synthetic gathering of professional and scientific knowledge. They overlap these with the practical field empirical experience of the authors dealing with the issue.

Results. The Roma family is a patriarchal constitution ensuring the transmission of the cultural and customary heritage of the Roma. Through education by imitation, children learn through the customs and habits of their relatives to observe and practice the faith, thus ensuring the continuation of the family line in a living faith.

Conclusion. The Roma have adopted majority Christianity in Slovakia as their own. However, Roma groups retain their customs and rituals, which they have incorporated into their religion and practice of faith. For the Roma, religion and its association with customs and traditions is a connection to God. Therefore, these rituals need to be observed in order to be handed down to the next generation.

Keywords: education, customs, faith, God, family

INTRODUCTION

Blood kinship is an important social group not only for the majority population, but also for the Roma. It is lived in by individuals who are together because of marriage or by blood kinship, rarely by adoption. Kinship is a signature of the character of being Roma. The author Zuzana Budayová et al. (2023) point out that kinship itself is essential for them. It comes down to the exploitation of utility from the older generation to the younger one. Its importance tends to be even more in the fact that it is a socializing subject. Subordination is instrumental to the flowering of personality and can interfere with it (Mappe-Niediek, 2014).

Roma can exist in nuclear kinship, which means that only parents and their children are in the same household. However, quite often there is extended kinship, where there are excessively many relatives in one dwelling, and thus, with the exception of parents and their children, they are grandparents, and eventually they may be uncles or aunts and their children (Kraus, 2008).

The latter are able to provide all-round assistance in times of difficult situations. In this respect, it is an obvious form of social work that is not based on professionalism. A member of the kinship who is in distress turns to his or her loved one with a request to help (Tvrdoň, Akimjak et al., 2022). Sometimes a friendly approach or a hug is an extremely appropriate help, which in more than one case proves to alleviate a seemingly hopeless or even unmanageable situation. Material, financial or other worries often show up in Roma kinship families. In particular, these are inadequately

formed housing conditions, lack of livelihood or clothing. These are all things that are commonplace for the majority society (Rosinský, 2006).

Blood line has an intrinsic place in the existence of the Roma. It involves the transmission of experience to the younger ones, who are thus provided with family education and proper protection. It is not a rule, but bloodlines can provide their members with a relatively good background and constancy. This is where trained field social workers step in and strive to improve the functioning of the socially unsatisfactory Roma family. They contribute to repairing the undermined social connections in the home atmosphere, encouraging family members to adopt the right attitudes towards being and to behave in socially appropriate ways (Budayová, Pavlíková et al. 2022; Ludvigh Cintulová & Radková et al., 2022; Rusnáková, 2007).

In the case of Roma kinship, one cannot speak of a stable number of members; rather, it is a group representing a whole. Vasko Kusin (2015) states that when tensions arise, these are experienced collectively. For that, social work should be delivered not only to one member of this kinship, but inevitably should also work with the remaining members. Any member of the family manifests himself as its representative. The members of the kinship influence each other corporately.

If an individual makes mistakes, then it is understood as the mindset of the whole family. Contradictory situations are also possible, namely that an individual is perceived by those around him to be prominent and valued by virtue of a proper deed, and the rest of his kinship is perceived in this light. Although the Roma gains a position among others by the merit of his or her own kinship (Ludvigh Cintulová, Radková et al., 2022).

Solidarity is presented in the Roma family, which can be observed as a symbiosis of older girls or older young men in the identical dwelling with their parents. There is even proper provision for orphans, but the elderly population is not neglected, with the latter being cared for by their close relatives (Facuna & Lužica, 2017; Ludvigh Cintulová et al., 2023).

The Roma never exists on his own, he has always been surrounded by several blood relatives. This is different from the majority relatives, who live mostly separated from the other blood relatives and only come together in emergencies. The Roma population will only remove an individual from their unit in very serious cases, usually if he or she performs an unacceptable act. In that case it is called his psychological skone (Budayová & Ludvigh Cintulová, 2023).

The provision of mutual assistance among the Roma is characterised by solidarity. As Otto Csámpai (2007) and Kamil Kardis et al. (2023) state this is parallel to religion. It cannot be argued that faith in particular has a substantial contribution to how Roma coexist and manage to help each other without the intervention of others. Social solidarity presents their beliefs.

On the contrary, the man acts authoritatively, it is a question of his prestige. He is the master of this kinship and his opinion is always decisive. The family is only formed when the first child is born, and later on the following

ones. A vast community is involved in the education of the children. The offspring has a quantum of siblings with whom it inhabits a common privacy even with the rest of the offspring and the adults. In this sense we note the solemnity of religious faith, and likewise the assistance thus afforded to (Radková et al., 2022; Zeman, 2006).

The Romani heritage, i.e., kinship, evokes the ultimate authority. Among the Roma, multiple bloodlines are more preferred than, few bloodlines. The reason for this is that it fades away more quickly. The advantage of plural kinship is above all that it can rely only on its own strength and allows for fraternal belonging. Roma kinship is formed in the immature period of life. At that time they also enter into marriages, which are admittedly arranged in advance by the families. The situation is different in the case of few-member kinship, where marriages are contracted with other partners. Consequently, there is a breakdown of the whole (Ludvigh Cintulová, Radková et al., 2022; Rafael, 2018).

The marriages in question do not tend to have a long-term existence. They are usually accompanied by the abandonment of the children and their placement in the Centre for Children and Family, crisis centres or re-socialisation institutions. These institutions, by their function, touch numerous Roma communities, facilitating their cumulative development on a religious-moral basis. Their purpose is to provide assistance in improving the quality of existence, primarily of children and underage young people. They mainly focus on education, but also provide other human services and carry out interventions oriented towards the prevention of socio-pathological phenomena. There is a higher level of crime, drug addiction, but also abuse and different forms of violence perpetrated in these relationships (Ludvigh Cintulová, Budayová et al., 2022; Pavlíková et al., 2023; Selická, 2008).

These are especially situations that require the quality and professional action of experienced field or community social workers. They first of all work with the individual to trace his/her perception of the problem and in the meantime they also make a social analysis of the collective, other members of the kinship in order to arrive at a cumulative coping of the problem (Sirotkin et al., 2023). As a result of the Roma's temperament, working with them is often chaotic and requires a specially prepared social worker. The latter must have the authority to be able to function with different categories of clients and even with those who initially lack the internal identification with having a stranger involved in their problems (Mappe-Niediek, 2014). Zuzana Budayová et al. (2023) also point to the cohesiveness and immediate possibilities of solving problems not only for minors but also for adolescents, regardless of the individual's or family's capacity.

A suitable climate must be achieved to begin the work, for without this the complete intention to help is doomed to failure. Roma cannot trust a stranger and therefore prefer to turn to someone close to them for help... Only as a last resort will they accept the alternative of turning to a field

or community social worker who seeks to be helpful in solving the birth of social problems or engages in solving existing problems (Kondrla et al., 2022).

Old age and elderly members of the kinship are also of great importance in the existence of the Roma. The latter are further admired and especially their existential experience, which they pass on to the younger generation. Yet the care of the younger members of the kinship for the elderly remains incomplete. In the event of the death of an elderly individual, the youngest of the couple in particular takes over the property of the elderly individual, who has not yet owned any property (Tvrdoň, Akimjak et al., 2022; Vanková, 2005).

PRACTICING THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

Many times the Roma ask the Creator for forgiveness of their sins, yet they are indifferent to the sacrament of penance. Manifestations of inadequate behaviour fall within the competence of both field and community social workers, who carry out an intensive interview with the client to find out what was the reason for such behaviour. They may also be assisted in this by the Christianity they will adhere to. Similarly, marriage is a particularly serious issue for Roma, although perceptions of it vary. The essence remains intact (Budayová, Svoboda et al., 2022).

It is the partners' duty to take responsibility for collective existence. Not all the time, but they acknowledge the creed of commitment that tends to be absent in their existence. For them, neither obedience nor the inseparability of the partnership plays a decisive role (Maturkanič et al., 2022; Vojtíšek et al., 2012).

Anointing of the sick is not desired in the Roma community.

They lack interest in participating in the sacrament because they conflate it with death. For this reason, it can be considered significant to explain to them the meaning of the special sacraments. Stanislav Matulay (2000) states that the Stations of the Cross, in which they regularly participate and in which prayers are offered, are of considerable importance to the Roma. They experience it as a majestic thing, because each presentation presents to them something that is also related to their real being. Particular requests are made to eliminate the disparities between the Roma and the majority population.

The elimination of differences is also sought by social work itself, assisted by specially trained community social workers who are engaged in working with the Roma population and who pay attention to the social inclusion of socially maladjusted individuals on both a subjective and local level (Kobylarek, Błaszczynski et al., 2022). The demonstration of faith is also evident during the final farewell to the deceased. The deceased is given in the coffin those objects which he used during his life. The purpose of

this ceremony is to prevent the deceased from returning among the living, whom he might have influenced negatively. During the viewing of the deceased, refreshments were consumed which were not hot. Alcoholic beverages were also sipped by the deceased. Not every family has the money to pay such a last farewell (Kondrla et al., 2023; Repko & Štrba, 2010; Tvrdoň, Lojan et al., 2022).

The poor relatives likewise ask their blood relatives to assist in the last farewell to the deceased. This takes place in the warm summer months in an external environment. All these peculiarities have to be taken into account by the community social worker, as well as by the field social worker who deals with the difficult problems that arise with the Roma community. They contribute to the emergence or aggravation of already poor social positions and the need to address the social complications that have arisen (Oláh, 2016).

BAPTISM – BOLIPENĚ

Just as it is essential for the majority population, it is essential for the minority population to have their offspring baptized. During the baptism, which they call bolipen, the admission of the child into the church society takes place. Theology does not hold any great weight for them (Kobylarek, Madej et al., 2022).

For the realisation of baptism it is necessary to ask for a godfather, in Romani language - kirvo, and in the same way to choose an adequate godmother, or kirvi. All this is to be arranged by the young parents of the child at a time when he or she is not yet born. The purpose of performing baptism is sometimes to bind oneself to the majority community. Sometimes a person who is not Roma is chosen as a godparent. The role of the godparents is to bring gifts to the baby. There is also the possibility for them to be involved in the role of foster parents of the child until the child reaches maturity (Vojtišek et al., 2012). Lýdia Lehoczka (2006) points out that they assist in helping the guardians to direct their offspring well and to make their kinship functional. As long as this intention is sufficiently fulfilled, until then the intervention and participation of the field social worker is not necessary. Legal representatives as well as godparents come with the little child to the house of God for the purpose of carrying out his baptism. After the baptism ceremony, when the child is already baptised, he is no longer declared a pagan, but becomes a Christian (Maturkanič et al., 2023).

Roma who have participated in baptism are actively expressing their religion. In the kinship, the religious ritual of baptism is followed by a large celebration, at which cash is collected from the guests to be given to the baptised child. The godparents visit the child later and the child howls to them each time. This is why well-to-do individuals are chosen as godparents, even if they are not of Roma origin. Among the resettling Roma, the

person who performed the baptism was the highest man in the community, the vajda (Belišová & Mojžišová, 2014).

In the case of the Wallachian Roma it is a little different with baptism. Even before the baby is born, the parents go to their relatives and choose godparents. These are usually their brothers or sisters. Since often the brothers and sisters are underage, uncles or aunts are subsequently called as godparents. Each time it is important that they choose younger relatives. The reason for this is that they are to accompany the child through its life until it reaches proper maturity. Once they have been chosen, the date of the baptism is set. The godparents then invite others to attend (Šusterová, 2015).

The head of the kinship puts a bottle of fine alcoholic beverage on an exceptionally laid table. If the godfather agrees to attend the baptism of the baby, then he will also place other bottles of alcohol on the table, thus wishing to pay due homage to the adoption of the position of godparent. The legal guardian of the little child proclaims the following words:

In the name of the Creator of the world I find you, Roma! That the Almighty may give you infinite being and health. I intend to converse with the honest Roma present here. May you be healthy and blessed, my dear kinsman. There will be one more individual in my kindred, and I should be exceedingly glad if you would remove this new-born from the devil's corner. Blessed are you too, dear Roma! (Stojka & Pivoň, 2003, p. 33)

The reason for the implementation of social work in the Roma community is also based on the natural environment that surrounds it. Whether the born children are cared for and whether any of them are in any way abused by their relatives, whether they do not endure any violence, fights or other inappropriate manipulation. When a child arrives, the Roma always count on it being a male offspring. He is supposed to be the successor of the family, and in his full maturity he is to represent his kinship formally. The new-born child is first placed in the hands of the old mother, for its mother is considered dirty. The moment she brings holy water from God's house and sanctifies the offspring by sprinkling it, then we can say that she has freed herself from ritual immorality (Judák et al., 2022; Kováč & Mann, 2003).

Of more serious importance than the baptism itself is the solemnity in kinship. A newborn baby is carried into the kinship in the embrace of its godmother, arriving first in the household. The wealthier Roma kinships choose two pairs of godparents. These are sprinkled with red wine after the christening of the child. This is accompanied by the following speech: „May both godparents be blessed, may they live for a hundred years! The others retort: Lord God hear! (Stojka & Pivoň, 2003, p. 39).

Roma legal representatives have three names chosen for their child. Immediately after birth, the first one is whispered into his ear by his mother. Thus, it is a secret name, and it is pronounced only the first and at the same time the last time. No one knows about it and it is characterized by magical

power. His mission is to outwit evil forces. This secret name is known exclusively only to the mother of the child and no one else. The latter name has its origin from the circumstances that are part of the child's birth. These are mostly gypsy names, related to the qualities of a human being. The predominant names are Šuko, which means in Slovak language Slim. Subsequently, it may be Kálo, which evokes Black, and for the rest it is Luludži, or Flower. Especially the third name is chosen for the child only at the baptism itself and it is by this name that the child is addressed throughout its life (Cohn, 2009).

Male offspring are most often named after their godfathers. Mostly they are identical to the names of the majority population. Nowadays, it is mainly the parents who choose the name for their offspring. They are mostly motivated by the main character from various soap operas or soap operas they adore (Bešenyel, 2009).

THE SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST AND THE SACRAMENT OF CONFIRMATION

Roma children receive the sacrament of the Eucharist at the age of 12 or older. They prepare for it in collective meetings organised by the priest at the same time with all the children who wish to receive it. These are primarily very religious Roma families. At times it is also at the instigation of the majority population that forces them to participate in the sacrament of the Eucharist in order to integrate into society. Along with baptism and the sacrament of the Eucharist, the sacrament of confirmation is also part of the sacraments (Belišová, 2015).

Roma do not realise the meaning of the sacrament of Confirmation because they do not even participate in it. It is not as essential to them as, for example, baptism. Therefore, there are not many Roma people who participate in the Sacrament of Confirmation. It is more accurate to understand it as a rare occasion when relatives commit themselves to having their offspring participate in the Sacrament of Confirmation. In some cases, the Roma commit to it even at an older age (Bešenyel, 2009).

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Some clients come to a field or community social worker when a loved one dies and they are unable to cope with the situation. The client's authority and the atmosphere in which they find themselves, their state of mind in this socially difficult position, must be taken into account. They go around him and light seven candles. This quantity signifies magical power. All objects used during the last farewell must be in odd numbers. This definitely applies to bottles or jars as well. It is these that are used to toast the life of the deceased and his acts. After the death of a man, it is the wife's duty to cut her hair as it evokes her attractiveness (Kováč & Mann, 2003).

A woman is no longer allowed to appear in public after the death of her partner. It is her duty to dress in dark to black clothes. Such clothes are also worn by his closest offspring or close relatives. As long as there is a disease in the kinship, dark or black colour is not to be worn so that it does not cause death. Children of a young age do not wear black clothing, but only have a black ribbon in their hair or wear a black scarf. This also applies to more distant relatives. The dark colour is also worn by relatives on the death of a woman (Schmidt, 2013).

Should both spouses die, it is the duty of the next of kin to take care of their immature children. If they are unable to provide this care, then institutional assistance comes in, which is implemented by field or community social workers, by trying to respect the emerging rejection in the particular Roma community, while it is important to note that they try to prevent, eliminate or prevent the accumulation of further problems in relation to orphaned children (Jakoubek, 2004).

There are no such habits among Roma living in the city. There, family members escort the deceased separately - women from men. The same is also used in the marriage ceremony by one of the participants asking the guests present to behave appropriately to the situation. In previous years, the visitation of the deceased was accompanied by debating about the experiences of the deceased or with the deceased (Samková, 2012).

The Wallachian Roma are of the mindset that the deceased is in the other world after death, where there are many other Roma who died before. It is not typical for them to guard the deceased. Mostly they say to each other such phrases as «Would that we were blessed! May the Lord Almighty not allow us to meet for a celebration on a similar occasion for at least a hundred years, but to gather for marriages or baptisms!» For this reason, the field social worker should take seriously that some discussions are undesirable for the client and therefore possibly avoid them (Stojka & Peony, 2003).

The choice of the coffin in which the deceased has his final resting place is adapted to his age. If an elderly man, possibly an elderly woman, dies, the nearest casket in yellow, red, or brown is chosen. Under no circumstances do Roma choose a dark or black coffin, as this would cause another death. When a young person or child dies, white, silver or golden coffins are chosen. The deceased is supposed to be wearing new clothes, showing how highly he was valued during his lifetime. In the coffin, they place cash, gold, alcohol, medicines he or she took, or even holy pictures or a holy rosary. Sometimes there are objects that surrounded the deceased throughout his or her entire existence. If they are determined that they will also lay tobacco, they never put matches to it, and this is because if he decided to return among the living, he could cause a fire. The deceased is mostly guarded by men. They always remember him only in a good way (Ostalowska, 2016; Podolinská & Hrustič, 2016; Smith-Bendell, 2009).

A community social worker must also listen to his/her client if he/she sees any peculiarities in his/her way of life in comparison to those that are

usual in the majority population. He or she actively creates a good social climate, in a way that positively develops the client's self-esteem, independence, and humane interaction that strengthens the client's views on life (Chovanec, 2018).

Mourners of the deceased may again dress in colourful clothes and use a variety of frills, or participate in various pastimes (Adamková, 2007; Zeman, 2006).

As the authors Irena Adamová (2007), Lucia Ludvigh Cintulová, Libuša Radková and others (2022) point out, no human being wants to accept the idea that after death his or her existence permanently ceases to exist. Well, that is why people have the view that life goes on, but somewhere else. They idealize their view of heaven, and at the same time there arises in them the uneasiness of finding themselves in hell after their death.

Michal Vašečka (2002) points out that Christians have identical views about the continuation of existence in the hereafter. The souls of the departed are divided on the basis of the deeds they performed during their life on the earth's surface. Those who have performed positive deeds find themselves in heaven at the throne of God, and conversely, those whose existence has been marred by a multitude of evil deeds go to a hot hell.

When a person of the clan dies, the funeral feast is held without delay, not as in the majority community after the last farewell to the unfortunate person. After death, many windows are opened in the abode where the deceased lived. The reason for this is to allow his soul an uncomplicated departure from the earthly world. It is strictly forbidden for anyone to mock the deceased (Repko & Štrba, 2010).

CONCLUSION

Roma faith is diverse. It consists not only in concrete church attendance and participation in holy masses and sacraments, it is also about practicing faith in the home environment, which is favourable to it precisely because of the inheritance of customs and traditions in Roma families. Many in mainstream society think that the practice of faith among the Roma, alongside the various customs and traditions, is a show-off or a spectacle. However, it is their outward presentation of faith, which has not only an inner spiritual aspect, but also an outward demonstration of faith in God and a demonstration of their attachment to the Church as such.

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