

HABILITATION THESIS REVIEWER'S REPORT

Masaryk University

Faculty

Faculty of Social Studies

Applicant

Mgr. Jitka Navrátilová, Ph.D.

Habilitation thesis

The Erosion of Relational Anchoring as a Mechanism of Social Disadvantage among Children of Incarcerated Parents

Reviewer

doc. Mgr. et Mgr. Kateřina Mikulcová, Ph.D.

Reviewer's home unit, institution

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Review Report

The submitted habilitation thesis addresses an important yet still insufficiently explored area of social work research—the life circumstances of children of incarcerated parents. By examining the relational mechanisms through which parental incarceration contributes to children's social disadvantage, the candidate addresses a topic of considerable theoretical, empirical, and societal relevance. The thesis is grounded in a coherent long-term research programme and culminates in the formulation of an original analytical concept—the erosion of a child's relational anchoring—which constitutes its principal scientific contribution.

Rather than presenting a collection of related publications, the thesis demonstrates the gradual development of a sustained and coherent research agenda. The six included studies form a logical progression from research on children's well-being and the capability approach to the conceptualisation of relational anchoring as a mechanism explaining how parental incarceration contributes to children's long-term social disadvantage and social exclusion. This cumulative development clearly demonstrates the candidate's ability to build an independent programme of research.

The principal strength of the thesis lies in the development of the concept of relational anchoring. The candidate convincingly argues that parental incarceration should not be understood merely as a family disruption or a consequence of socioeconomic disadvantage, but as a process that gradually erodes children's relational resources across multiple social contexts. By integrating the capability approach with attachment theory, Dr. Navrátilová develops an original analytical framework that is theoretically coherent and highly relevant for contemporary social work.

The thesis demonstrates an excellent command of the relevant literature. The capability approach, attachment theory, ecological perspectives on child development, and broader relational approaches are not simply reviewed but effectively synthesised into a coherent explanatory framework. This integration substantially strengthens both the originality and explanatory value of the proposed concept.

Methodologically, the habilitation reflects a diverse research programme that combines conceptual and empirical scholarship. The empirical research is complemented by conceptual and methodological work that provides a solid foundation for the development of the final analytical framework.

The practical significance of the work is equally noteworthy. The proposed framework offers valuable implications for assessing the needs of children of incarcerated parents and enriches social work by shifting attention from material disadvantage alone towards relational processes

and cumulative mechanisms of social disadvantage. As such, it has clear relevance for professional assessment, intervention planning, and social work education.

Minor observations

Although the overall quality of the thesis is very high, several aspects could provide opportunities for further development in future research.

First, an interesting avenue for future theoretical development would be to position the concept of **relational anchoring** more explicitly within the broader landscape of contemporary relational social theory. While the thesis successfully integrates the capability approach and attachment theory into a coherent analytical framework, future work could further explore its relationship to established relational perspectives, such as, Emirbayer's relational sociology, or Folgheraiter's relational social work. Engaging more explicitly with these traditions could strengthen the wider theoretical positioning and interdisciplinary visibility of the proposed concept, while also demonstrating how the notion of relational anchoring complements and extends existing relational approaches. Such an extension would not diminish the originality of the framework but would further enhance its potential to inform broader debates on relationality, social disadvantage, and social work theory.

Second, while the concept of relational anchoring is convincingly developed in the context of children of incarcerated parents, it would be valuable to explore its analytical applicability to other groups of vulnerable children experiencing different forms of relational disruption. Such comparative work could further strengthen the broader applicability of the proposed analytical framework.

Overall evaluation

Overall, this habilitation thesis represents a mature, coherent, and original scholarly contribution to the field of social work. Beyond its immediate contribution to research on children of incarcerated parents, the thesis demonstrates the candidate's ability to build a sustained programme of research that progressively integrates empirical evidence, theoretical reflection, and conceptual innovation. This trajectory—from empirical investigation to the formulation of an original analytical framework—is a hallmark of scientific maturity and constitutes one of the strongest qualities of the submitted habilitation.

Reviewer's questions for the habilitation thesis defence

- The concept of the erosion of relational anchoring constitutes the central theoretical contribution of your habilitation thesis. To what extent do you consider this concept to be applicable beyond the context of children of incarcerated parents? Which other groups or social situations do you believe could benefit from this analytical framework, and what modifications, if any, would be necessary?
- The thesis conceptualises the erosion of relational anchoring as a mechanism linking parental incarceration with children's social disadvantage. Which protective factors do you consider most important in preventing or interrupting this process, and what implications does this have for social work practice?

Conclusion

The habilitation thesis entitled “The Erosion of Relational Anchoring as a Mechanism of Social Disadvantage among Children of Incarcerated Parents” by Mgr. Jitka Navrátilová, Ph.D., **fulfils** requirements expected of a habilitation thesis in the field of Social Policy and Social Work.

Date: 14.8.2026

