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Changes within Functioning of Contemporary Families – Introduction to the Reflections

The family surrounding is the one that predominantly shapes human development and socialisation. It is represented by parents, sibling and older relatives. To a large degree, due to its constant provision of a personal example, family exerts influence on the personality of its offspring, its interests, habits, customs, preferences, social and moral attitudes as well as beliefs and points of view.

In the pre-industrial era, a traditional, patriarchal family, subordinate to the father, was a mainstay. Family and productive roles remained tightly linked to each other, with family interest superior to the individual needs (Kwak, 2005). Cohesion, determined by material bonds and lack of individual tendencies of its members were its main features, with its clearly implied institutional qualities. The marriage relation, reduced to the material dimension, narrowed the scope of expectations of the partners, particularly as far as women were concerned. Wife was inferior to her husband, however, his authority and power had no reference to the features of the character, but resulted from socially accepted status he had been granted (Majkowski, 1997). No attachment was assigned to the emotional bond, hence autocratic mode prevailed. Children constituted the essential goal of the marriage, hence they were perceived instrumen-

tally. Nonetheless, it was assumed that the offspring would inherit the family properties. Children's position in a family was similar to the one of mother's, and it was definitely low. Hard work, obedience and religiousness were instilled as a part of upbringing influences, accompanied with subordination to parental will (Doniec, 2001). In consequence, such individual was not autonomous and could not deal without the family independently.

Families of the industrial era were known for their systematic shift from the institutional character. A new, contemporary model of a family reduced to two generations emerged (parents and children), involving autonomous life in separate flats and running own household. Not only men, but also women, began to provide financially for the family. The importance of personal bonds also rose, as much as the significance of fulfilling individual needs, emotional exchange and value of the interactions. At the same time, families became less stable and more exposed to dissolution as the personal bonds lost their stability in comparison to the material alliances, that had previously determined the family life (Kwak, 2005).

Egalitarian and partnership principles became dominant among spouses while carrying out parental and marital tasks. There were no binding roles and specifically defined family roles with this regard, as all the activities were subject to negotiation. The distance between husband and wife as well as between parents and children significantly shortened. Relations with parents were more of friendship and partnership nature, with its emancipation from the arbitrary parental authority. Children's position also changed, as they began to be perceived autotelically. Parents drew a lot of attention to the multidimensional growth of their offspring. Moreover, it was a standard that both the mother and the father worked professionally, so women became independent from their husbands

Industrial production was, without any doubt, of paramount importance in the family lives. Production activities of its members were carried out away from family environment, concurrently separating their labour institution from the family. These changes have, in turn, crucially impacted the current family lifestyle, especially that the labour market had been also participated by women. In the capitalism era, undertaking labour at factories by women and children contributed to the altered role of the father in a family, as it deprived him of supervisory power, strengthening further development of the family lives towards democracy and equal position of all its members. Progress in technology and science, accompanied by a widespread education managed to rationalise family functioning and the post-war households, extending the range of inner family freedom.

Since the post-war period until currently, there have been many approaches towards modeling the family as a social group and as upbringing environment. The first stage (initiated shortly after war) was characterised by limited caretaking functions of the family, hence it was compensated by various social welfare and educational institutions such as kindergartens, nursery schools, as well as schools, children's and youth organisations. It provided some parents with the misconception that the burden of the upbringing duties had been accepted by out-of-family institutions. Currently, the exceptionality of the family within its influences on child's growth is expressed – among others – in the fact that it is the most essential and crucial element of social bonds. Family members, establishing the nearest surrounding for their child, are predominantly the most important persons in the first years of the child's life. Children's attitudes towards people, different issues and life in general are founded on such contacts, what significantly determines the subsequent patterns of child's adaptation, teaching it to think of own self the way it is perceived by its family members. Considering the role of the

family within the upbringing impact on the child's personality, Stanisław Kawula (Kawula, Bragieli, Janke, 1999) acknowledges that emphasis should be put on its emotional bond with the family. This, in turn, is established in the course of fulfilling child's needs, and is subject to ways of its accomplishment in families. The author stresses that mothers are assigned with special tasks in this regard since they should provide a child with sensory and emotional experiences as a result of which such child is able to establish emotional relations with its father, peers or social group. Nonetheless, establishing such emotional contacts with others must rely on strong emotional bond with the closest relatives.

Family understood as a social group constitutes a community of relatives living both in a common household and out of it. Such group manifests its sense of autonomy towards non-relatives, having own tasks and life objectives, set of fixed interpersonal relations and given structure. Thus, it contains all essential sociological features of a small group with indirect social contacts, and interpersonal relations of close, emotional nature (Badora, Czeredrecka, Marzec, 2001).

While making attempt to define family in the context of sociological theories (Szlendak, 2000) it is legitimately recognised as a microstructure, i.e. a small social group, whose members are bound with marriage and kinship ties (sometimes adoption), commonly running the household and serving appropriate social functions within. Hence, from the sociological perspective, family belongs to so called primary groups, what implies its fundamental function in generating social character and social ideals of given individuals. "Its universality is confirmed in the fact that it has existed and exists in all social and economic formations as a social institution, i.e., a set of human activities, rooted in the tradition of all cultures, oriented towards fulfilling the needs of its members" (Szlendak, 2000).

In order to define contemporary family in the pedagogical context, it can be concluded that it is a basic social group comprising of parents, children and relatives. It is specified by its emotional and formal bonds defining mutual relations, parental and children's obligations, marital bond as well as material and housing community involving set of functions it provides. The most common include (Prokosz, 2009b, pp. 303–304): *procreation* (ensuring the continuity of the species); *material function* (providing with everyday needs); *social objectives* (preparing children to enter social life, nursing and upbringing them); *education* (attention to successful accomplishment of educational path); *emotional and expressive function* (fulfilling emotional needs); *culture* (transmission of cultural heritage to children); *caretaking and security* (family support); *economy* (running a household, activities within production, e.g. agriculture); *legislation and control* (education and verification of traditional behaviour) and last but not least – recreation and leisure.

Family functions, although subject to transformation, should remain proportionate, so the family system would not degrade or destabilise, and structural as well as functional disturbances could be prevented, as they could evoke dysfunction or even pathology within given family. Furthermore, a family constitutes an interpersonal system of inner-group relations or a type of social institution. Organisation of the family has impact on modes of mutual relations, ways of conduct between the family members, and its overall recognition. The role of the mother, the father and maternity, as well as child's role, are fully accomplished and can reveal their abundance only within harmonious, united and unanimous families. It is generally recognised that each family has its own internal organisation and network of family relationships. Such system can be determined both by internal and external positivities of such family, providing for its consolidation, or quite the contrary – it can rely on hostile potential threatening its unity, bringing about family dissolution.

Phenomena occurring within postindustrial societies generated number of changes within family life, most importantly including (Tyszka, 1999; Prokosz, 2005b):

- Rising unemployment rate, drop in the real value of wages.
- Lack of flats, difficulties in acquiring resources sufficient to fulfill needs.
- Significant rise in the women's employment (including spouses) not only on the economic grounds, but on account of self-accomplishment.
- Advanced egalitarianisation in marriage or family.
- Differentiation of norms and values within given members of the family and mutual relations.
- Displacement of traditional family values.
- Relatively lower children value from parents' perspective.
- Parental upbringing mistakes and abnormal upbringing influences.
- Lack of emotional bond between the family members.
- Inappropriate upbringing atmosphere.
- Family conflicts.
- Large disproportion within the range of fulfilling child's needs.
- Permanent negligence of parental duties.
- Individualisation of activities.
- Atomisation of the family members.
- Decreased cohesion and disintegration of significant number of families.
- Increased number of family conflicts and divorces.
- Lowered number of marriages, rise in the number of couples living in cohabitation or out of wedlock.
- Increased number of permanently incomplete families (due to death of one of the parents) or temporarily incomplete because of long-lasting, chronic diseases of one of the spouses, departure of one of the spouses (e.g. aboard) or serving deprivation of liberty.

- New forms of motherhood and fatherhood; in vitro procedure, surrogacy.
- Large-scale social pathologisation originating from family life (criminogenic lifestyle, gambling, social parasitism, prostitution, incest, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, mental diseases).

It must be bore in mind that the above set of issues is not complete. Contemporary family is undoubtedly different in comparison to a family two decades ago. And since there are problems emerging within such communities, it should provide a premise to explore it more profoundly both within pedagogy and social psychology research. The aim of these reflections should not, however, focus on the description of the current phenomena, but concern an in-depth analysis of the problems and proposals of support, achievable and feasible in disorganised environments. ■