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CHANGING FAMILY AND FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

This volume addresses a variety of issues related to family life in contemporary Poland. The authors of the articles present changes in the family institutions, which are analysed through different theoretical approaches and methodologies.

The authors deal with a few specific subjects about family structures such as conflict of roles in the biographical experiences of women, work-life balance, internal inequalities and distribution of goods, funds and obligations in the family. Since in Poland the family is the basic source of various forms of support – material, physical, mental, emotional and other – other authors focus on family functions and analyse the topic of nesting, family networks of disabled people and new forms of caring connected with the use of new technologies.

The aim of this introduction is to outline the contexts in which the analysed phenomena occur. All texts published here, in one way or another, refer to the problem of changing obligations resulting from family ties. Among the phenomena that affect the family structure and the family commitments the most important are, in my opinion, two processes – individualization and an aging population. Therefore, in the further part of this text, there is a short overview of (1) the individualisation of family structures on the example of cohabitation, (2) emerging discrepancies between the socially defined obligations and the possibilities of fulfilling them by family members in the aging society.

All Western societies undergo social transformation and these changes do not spare the family. The process of transforming the institution of family proceeds in two stages. In the first, the transition from an extended to a nuclear family and a drop in the fertility rate take place, in the second stage the disintegration of the elementary family occurs, a symptom of which is the growth of non-formalized relationships and divorces (Van de Kaa 1987). Before

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the second demographic transition the family was large – thanks to the high fertility rate – and at the same time deprived of older generations, grandparents and great grandparents. The post-transition family is the opposite of this. Its characteristic feature is a reduction in fertility and as a consequence a reduced number of individuals forming the same generation, with simultaneous occurrence of several generations. Together with the demographic change, the role of cross-generational relations increases (Szukalski 2005: 100). This multigenerational structure appears together with reduced numbers of individuals in younger generations. This phenomenon brings consequences both on the micro- and macro- scales. In most Western societies, reproduction is maintained below the threshold of simple replacement rate. On the micro-social level, changes in family life increase the probability of having living grandparents and great grandparents, and this result in the growth of costs connected with taking care of seniors (Szukalski 2010: 8).

Another process – individualization – loosens the bonds between the family and the individual's biography. The pluralism of the forms of family life results in discontinuity of the family's biography, manifesting itself in individual stories of life as divorce, remarriage, partnership, and single parenthood (Beck 2002: 176–177). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim emphasize that maintaining close relations with others requires balancing between contradictory requirements and negotiating. Family relations are fragile and burdened with risk; they become conditional, and they transform family relations from the community of needs into kinship by choice. Looking at transformations of the family as a social institution, the loss of the importance of responsibilities, loyalty, devotion or commitment is particularly essential. Family relations – similarly to other social relations – function as short-term transactions rather than long-term relationships (Beck, Beck-Gernsheim 1995: 98).

As a result of structural changes, expectations formulated by previous generations connected with family roles become outdated. Obligations do not so much disappear as their hierarchy changes: responsibilities towards oneself become the priority (Taranowicz 2016: 34; Marody and Giza-Poleszczuk 2004: 145). The problem is further complicated in the case of the growing popularity of relationships which refer to the idea of a family (one example being cohabitating couples) but the responsibilities, rights and roles resulting from these family alternatives are not clearly defined (Żurek 2016: 22).

This article raises the issue of family relationships from the perspective of the responsibilities resulting from them. Responsibilities mean standard convictions which make an individual inclined to share resources and provide help for other people (Szukalski 2002). They change along with the social institutions they are part of. I would like to analyse the processes of individualization and aging of society in the context of redefinition of responsibilities which were until recently inseparable from family ties. I will begin with the family ideology which consists of commonly assumed perceptions of the subject of family, the social roles played in it, and the expectations connected with them (Tyszka 1998: 79). Changes in family commitments will be analysed in two contexts: individualization, on the example of cohabitation, as well as population aging and the problem of providing care for seniors.

FAMILY IDEOLOGY IN CONTEMPORARY POLAND: WHAT THE FAMILY MEANS TO POLES

In Polish society, the family belongs among the most important values: 85% of CBOS respondents declared that it is necessary for happiness and the opinion that one can live happily without it was shared only by 12% of the respondents (CBOS 2013a). The family is of fundamental importance for the feeling of satisfaction with life. For 72% of Polish people children are a source of satisfaction, and for 65% marriage or a stable relationship provide the same (CBOS 2018a: 2).

Most Polish people (71%) live within a short distance of members of their families, as parents, children, siblings, parents-in-law, grandparents, and grandchildren live in the same place or in a place nearby (CBOS 2013b: 2). This make staying in touch easier – 75% of CBOS respondents see their parents at least once per week, 67% meet their grandchildren with the same frequency, 64% with children living separately, and 41% with grandparents (CBOS 2013b: 3). This data suggests that the role of migration in cross-generational relations in Poland should not be overestimated; changes in the place of living take place within the area of districts (71%) and they are connected with moving to a place not too far away – 67% of migrants previously lived within a distance within 50 km (CBOS 2010a).

Most women may count on the support of their family in daily care of a child – support is provided to 90% by the husband/partner, 77% parents, 61% parents-in-law/parents of the partner (CBOS 2017b: 4). Family relationships are based on trust – 97% of respondents trusts the closest family, and 87% – more distant relatives (CBOS 2014). Polish people willingly spend their free time in their family circle – 37% of respondents prefer the company of their closest family – parents, children, siblings, 26% – most willingly spend time with their wife/husband or partner, while 12% choose the company of their acquaintances/friends (CBOS 2017a: 2).

However, the picture of the contemporary family is not so unambiguous. One symptom of a change in the model of the family applicable in Poland is the consequently decreasing number of child births. In 1985, people under the of age 19 constituted 31% of the population, while in the mid-1990s it was 28%, and in 2013 only 19% (GUS 2014: 6).

In addition, the image of the family as a safe, comfortable haven was undermined by feminist research which disclosed the occurrence of domestic violence. Recognition of violence and abuse as properties of family life showed different ways of experiencing the family by its members (Gilles 2003: 6–7; Heliosand Jedlecka 2017). In Poland, conviction about the occurrence of domestic violence is common – almost two-thirds of the respondents of TNS OBOP (63%) declared that they know families suffering from it living in their neighbourhood (TNS OBOP 2010: 4). However, the cohabitation of most Polish families is regarded as harmonious: in 54% of families quarrels, arguments and fights occur very rarely (CBOS 2012).

To summarize, for Polish people the family is both a declared value – it holds a position at the top of the hierarchy of values – as well as a realized value: Polish people value living near their family, they like to spend time in the family circle, they trust family members, and they also count on their support.

On the other hand, certain reservations should be made. Firstly, these characteristics concern families which already exist – as we are observing a delay in the time of starting a family, a dropping number of marriages, and a low birth rate. Secondly, negative phenomena appear in family life on a scale which is difficult to evaluate.

LIMITED FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES – COHABITATION

Taking the last 60 years into account, one can say that the changes taking place haven't resulted in the appearance of alternative forms of the family, but in their dissemination and the growth of their social acceptance (Kwak 2014: 8). For example, the growth of the tendency to cohabitate observed in many countries since the end of the 1960s is treated by researchers as a part of a broader process of transformation of family life defined as the second demographic transition (Van de Kaa 1987). By cohabitation we understand a relationship based on emotion, and 'stability is connected with the actual existence of a bond and community rather than a formal act establishing the relationship' (Kwak 2001: 23).

The history of cohabitation is much longer and is inseparably connected with the history of marriage and regulation of this institution (Kok and Leinarte 2015: 489). In the past, more or less until the middle of the 20th century, cohabitation allowed the bypassing of various limitations preventing formalization of an actual relationship, such as: lack of the institution of divorce, economic factors – organization of a wedding was so expensive that it required long term saving, and in certain regions of Europe the couples had to wait to get married until succession of the family's farm. Apart from legal and economic causes, informal relationships existed in the case of a misalliance or partners being of different religions (Kok and Leinarte 2015: 489).

These days, the meaning of unlegalized relationships has changed. The popularity and acceptance of relationships where no legal, mental, economic or other obstacles to marriage exist, that is a 'new type of cohabitation', is growing (Szukalski 2004: 64). Both of these types of relationships appear at the same time, even though they are located differently as far as their social basis is concerned. For representatives of higher social strata cohabitation is a way to defer the conclusion of marriage (until the time of achieving a desirable social status, appearance of children etc.). Within lower strata, it functions as a substitute for marriage (Szukalski 2004: 52).

Numerous authors are inclined to emphasize the similarity between cohabitation and marriage, presenting it more in opposition to living as a single person rather than formal relationships. Others assume an opposite perspective, believing that with respect to behaviours and expectations cohabiting persons are more similar to singles than to spouses (Heuveline and Timberlake 2004).

In any case, clear and permanent differences between cohabitation and marriage are evident. The basic differentiating factor is the level of involvement in the relationship (Perelli-Harris et al. 2014) and durability. 30% of marriages in Poland are dissolved by means of divorce, although the average length of cohabitation is shorter – within two years 50% of such relationships fall apart, and within five years, 90% (Stolarska 2012: 324).

In spite of this, the growing importance of cohabitation in Poland is indicated in research by CBOS, from which it can be concluded that most Polish people (54%) declare the need to formalize cohabitation relationships, but only 15% think that this is absolutely necessary. 39% think that nobody should be forced into marriage and for 37% the status of the relationship does not matter (CBOS 2013: 6).

Some researchers hold the opinion that cohabitation has not achieved a position equal to marriage and consider it an 'incomplete institution'. They emphasize that even in countries where the possibility of registering partnerships exists, their situation is worse than marriages due to regulations concerning ownership, tax, and retirement, as well as inheritance and adoption laws (e.g. Mynarska, Baranowska-Rataj and Matysiak 2014: 1111; Mynarska and Słotwińska-Rosłanowska 2015; Perelli-Harris and Gassen 2012).

The importance of cohabitation and its acceptance or rejection develops in various ways in individual countries and even environments. In the European Union, 9% of the population aged 20 and over live in this type of relationship. The highest share of cohabitation (not less than 14%) appears in Sweden, Estonia, France, Denmark, and Finland, with the lowest (less than 3%) in Greece, Poland, Malta, and Croatia. Please note that popularity of these relationships decreases with age – among people of the age 20–29, 15% cohabitate, within the range 30–40 it is 13%, and among people over 50 it is 4% (Stańczak, Stelmach and Urbanowicz 2016: 13). According to the National Census in 2011 in Poland, 390,000 couples remaining in partnerships were recorded, 54.6% of people declared as married, and 2.4% as being in informal relationships (GUS 2012: 56–57). One should remember, however, that determination of the level of cohabitation in Poland is burdened with a risk of error that is difficult to evaluate (Gizicka 2013: 76).

Family researchers focus on the effect of cohabitation and marriage on mental welfare, health, educational and life opportunities of children, etc. In spite of the many studies, it is difficult to draw unambiguous conclusions as to the superiority of one form of family life over the other. On one hand, numerous reports show that the level of satisfaction from life and happiness of married persons surveyed is higher than partners living together (Blekesaune 2018; Schultz Lee and Uno 2012). On the other hand, there are opinions that cohabitation brings more benefits than marriage (Blekesaune 2018; Musick and Bumpass 2012).

According to numerous studies, cohabitation negatively affects the quality and durability of subsequent marriage, which is less stable and satisfactory when compared to relationships not preceded by cohabitation (Jankowiak and Waszyńska 2011: 359; Smock, Caspar and Wyse 2008). However, the issue of the importance of cohabitation for subsequent 'family history' has not been clearly determined.

Monika Mynarska, Anna Baranowska-Rataj and Anna Matysiak came to interesting results concerning the social importance of cohabitation. They conducted quality studies in Warsaw among people aged 25–40. An element worth noticing in the analysed group is defining cohabitation as one of the stages in the development of a relationship. This allows the couple to test the relationship under low-risk conditions and predict its susceptibility to separation and divorce. The respondents associated the ease of leaving an informal relationship solely with the benefits, indicating just one restriction: informal relationships do not create an appropriate environment for raising children (Mynarska, Baranowska-Rataj and

Matysiak 2014: 1124–1126). The growth of extramarital births is, however, noticeable in Poland. Before 1989 the extramarital birth rate did not exceed 5% of births, in the 1990s it was 6–11%, and recently it was 19–22% (GUS 2014: 4).

RESPONSIBILITIES TOWARDS FAMILY MEMBERS IN AN AGING SOCIETY

A growing share of old people in the demographic structure imposes on society the challenge of ensuring them care and a decent old age. In Poland, the family is the most important group allowing fulfilment of the social, emotional and caregiving needs of elderly people, regardless of their place of residence and other social and demographic factors (Halicka 2006: 245). The family is also the basic source of various forms of support (material, physical, mental, emotional and other) for people with disabilities regardless of their age, place of residence, or type of disability (Janocha 2009; Mikołajczyk-Lerman 2011; Gałuszka and Gałuszka 2011; Zielińska-Król 2014).

While it is only in the family where seniors obtain support and care, this is compliant with their preferences: 59% respondents of the study 'Here comes the old age. Attitudes of people of the age before retirement' expressed their conviction that it is mainly the children who are responsible for supporting them (nearly 40% believed that this is the responsibility of the entire family) (Bojanowska 2009: 212–213).

However, the contemporary family is exposed to contradictory pressures which are difficult to reconcile. On one hand, it is perceived as the most important non-institutional system of support allowing old people to stay in their own living environment. On the other hand, in Western societies the possibilities of ensuring care for the oldest generations are restrained due to several factors:

- transformation of the family structure – reduction of its size,
- demographic aging of the family in which a higher number of people require support at the same time (four generations living together is not rare),
- spatial mobility forcing migration in search of jobs,
- extending the period of caregiving for elderly family members,
- assurance of care at a higher and higher cost,
- growth of expectations of non-independent persons with decreasing caregiving potential of the family (Błędowski 2012).

This list shows discrepancies between socially defined responsibilities towards elderly generations and the possibilities of fulfilling them by younger generations, in particular since the responsibilities are not divided equally. The basic role in the care of the oldest persons in the family is played by the middle generation of women, who are often burdened with tasks beyond their strengths. Considering the support they provide to the generations of their children and grandparents, they are known as the "sandwich generation".

Furthermore, the caregiver is torn between the responsibilities towards older members of the family, the necessity to take care of the welfare of their own family and their need for

self-fulfilment. This role is sometimes very exhausting, and psychophysical exhaustion may lead to aggression, hostility, reluctance, and mistreatment of their dependents and other people. Not under all circumstances are families able to rise to their care-related responsibilities; taking care of an elderly person is burdening physically, emotionally and materially, and it exposes the caretaker to a series of stressful situations resulting from emotional and physical exhaustion, lack of competence, shortage of financial resources etc. (Halicka 2014: 124).

FINAL REMARKS

The family is invariably a value highly appreciated by Polish people – only few of them believe that it is possible to achieve a success in life without family. They trust members of the family more than other people and spend most of their time with them. However, the processes of family transformation, reducing its size or replacing marriage with cohabitation, make responsibilities towards family members unclear; also unclear is the reply to the question of who belongs to the family.

Changes in the size and structure of the family have an effect on the functions fulfilled by it. One of the most visible consequences is the growing importance of the emotional function of the family, with simultaneous restriction of responsibilities and changes in the nature of responsibilities. One sign of this tendency is the growth of social acceptance of cohabitation relationships. This form of family life is appreciated mostly by young people, whereas among older Polish people its popularity is much lower. In young age, a person most willingly undertakes commitments towards himself/herself, and avoids undertaking them towards others, such as a partner, and in the case of any failure in life, support is ensured more by the family of origin rather than those in their own unformalized relationships.

However, with age, responsibilities towards others – one's own children and aging parents – become stronger and stronger, and it is difficult to avoid fulfilling them. The result of social transformations is also the situation today, with multiple generations (more generations living at the same time than ever before in the past) and the aging of society. In an aging society, family responsibilities – especially of the cross-generational nature – turn out to be a key factor for ensuring a decent old age (it is usually adult children who take care of their older parents).

The problem of transformations in the patterns of family life and the difficulty of reconciling them with social expectations (responsibilities) is coming to light. Although within the EU no common model of family-related policy is executed, in member states family benefits are regarded as important for shaping social capital, economic development and demographic growth. The common assumption for the policies which are executed is that the task of the state is to fulfil the needs of the family (Durasiewicz 2009: 69). In Poland the response of the state to transformations of the forms of family life is a pronatalist policy directed at support mainly for families with children (https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1124&langId=en&intPageId=4718#navItem-1). One subsequent effect may be the reduction of cross-generational responsibilities, as it will be easier for more numerous younger generations to fulfil them. At the micro-social level, new forms of caring, childbearing and helping family members are emerging. In these transformations of family, the use of new technologies plays a key role.

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