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## **Role of family in establishment of recreational behaviour patterns in children and young people**

### **Introduction**

Political, economic, social and educational changes which have been observed in recent decades have affected Polish families and educational processes typical of families. The transitions in Poland have caused that many families suffer from financial deficiencies connected with unemployment and other unfavourable phenomena. The differences in economic status of families, life quality and lifestyles, education, opportunities for promotion, areas of influence and the choice of friends have significantly deepened. Both positive and negative consequences of changes have affected conditions of living and functions of families: the contemporary family has lost its patriarchal and authoritarian character and raising children in families has become a combination of traditional ideas with modern lifestyles.

Sociocultural changes that are occurring all over the world substantially affect lifestyles, hierarchy of values and caring and educational functions of families. Family, in order to provide children with conditions for optimum psychophysical development, feeling of safety and to help them develop interests and prepare for using cultural goods, has to instil behavioural patterns and moral norms into children.

One of the important functions of contemporary families is health, recreation and social function that prepare children and young people to utilize their leisure time. Children are known to copy forms of behaviour and contacts that occur both in the family environment and outside them, with parents participating actively. Therefore, it is important that parents participate in games, playing and other

forms of recreation and encouragement for staying together with peers [Cudak 2001, p. 360].

Problems of health and fitness of citizens of the Republic of Poland are reflected by governmental documents such as e.g. programmes “Solidarne Państwo” (“The State of Solidarity”) and “Strategies for Development of Poland for 2007-2015” and “Global Strategy” concerning diet, physical activity and health, World Health Organization (WHO).

The vision and directions of development were specified unequivocally through definition of the main strategic objective: Active and Efficient Society. Sport and physical and mental activity are at increasingly high position in the system of individual and social values, contributing to comprehensive development of children, young people and adults.

Sport, recreation and tourism in developed countries are becoming the common goods and a part of social policies and they stimulate numerous branches of the industry and form a specific labour market. They represent an important factor in development of health, habits and health-oriented behaviours and a valuable form of spending leisure time.

The studies demonstrate a deteriorating level of physical capacity and physical fitness in the young generation, which results from negligence at the level of physical education in schools. Since 2004, the participation of young people in extracurricular programmes of sport and recreation has been gradually improving.

Current initiatives of the government, which result from the adopted strategy are aimed at: instilling in society the awareness of the role of active relax and demanded habits of spending leisure time, increasing the level of participation of children, young people and adults in recreational and movement activities. This should lead to improvement in physical capacity and psychophysical condition of young people, reduction in the number of overweight people and those with obesity as well as reduction of morbidity caused by the diseases of affluence, and, consequently, should substantially improve health indices in society [the Ministry of Sport 2007, pp. 3–6].

Polish society is still characterized by a low level of involvement in regular physical activity. Deficiency of physical fitness might cause a number of diseases, e.g. insufficiency of the cardiovascular system, poorer metabolic rate, obesity, rheumatic diseases and improper posture.

From the standpoint of physiology and endocrinology, a particularly beneficial form of activity is running, adjusted to individual opportunities of a person. During physical exercise, brain is more active than during sitting since movement represents a stimulus which helps release neurotransmitters but it also creates new neurons and connections in the brain. When the heart rate elevates, human brain attempts to protect the body from the stress by releasing the hormones which have repairing effect and regenerate nervous cells. Ability to regenerate is a very

important function since human brain starts losing the nervous tissue as early as at the age of 30. Exercises (aerobics) performed at small and moderate intensity strengthen nervous connections, which helps people learn better and process and remember information. Endorphins released during physical activity balance the feeling of fatigue and stress and they improve well-being [Sołtys 2014].

At present, leisure time and management of leisure time have become an important social problem and the focus of investigations carried out by numerous researchers. Each student, apart from going to school, doing homework and necessary activities connected with hygiene, sleeping, eating, helping families, have some leisure time which can be used according to their preferences. Biopsychical development of children and young people necessitates a creative activity, leisure, entertainment, meeting intellectual and social needs, and spending leisure time according to their interests and requirements of hygiene of school activities.

Obviously, leisure time is significantly affected by the family environment and such factors as economic conditions, mental and moral level of parents, aesthetic sensitivity, atmosphere of family life or interests of the members of family. The family's lifestyles and educational situation of children are affected by cultural conditions, education and vocational activation, economic status, relationships between parents and children, structure of the family and leisure time spent by parents.

Combined together, all the factors affect the criteria of values and attitudes concerning leisure time. The amount of leisure time, its content and form are affected by numerous factors, such as science at school and home, helping in households, time for commuting to school, sleeping, eating, extracurricular activities, financial and cultural conditions in the family.

Each family is obliged to protect and strengthen health through creation of optimum conditions for saving the basic health-related needs, ensuring the atmosphere which is conducive to mental development, development of interest, needs and attitudes related to health through being a good role model, establishing good habits and behaviours which are conducive to health. Furthermore, the families have to organize internal family lives according to the principles of somatic and psychical hygiene in cooperation with schools and institutions of extracurricular education and health care institutions [Ukleja 2011, p. 290 and further].

At present, psychologists emphasize substantial overload of students with school and extracurricular duties, which causes a dramatic decline in leisure time that a child should have. The amount and forms of management of leisure time affect the quality of life of a human. The basic role in education for recreation in early childhood was played by the family: mother, father, brothers and sisters, and grandparents. The family is the first community which introduces children into the world of physical activity games and playing, helps develop basic athletic skills

through playing and it represents the first community of health and ecological education through physical and tourist recreation. Leisure time represents a specific form of family life and one of the main benefits of recreation is integration of families, which are contemporary threatened with a number of disintegrating effects.

Joint recreation of families points to a number of educational values. Pleasant and healthy ways of spending leisure time promote healthy lifestyles, stimulate interest in physical exercise and become a behaviour pattern for children while it strengthens family ties, creativity and establishes positive habits.

The aim of the study is to emphasize a very important role of leisure time in raising children and young people and to demonstrate, based on a survey, the forms of activity of students from primary schools in their leisure time and the determinants of this activity. Despite a broad literature and numerous studies on leisure time of students, the problem has not been researched sufficiently to date, and is very topical from social and pedagogical standpoints since human activity and its type substantially affects the quality of life and development of personality.

### **1. Leisure time and its historical determinants**

Leisure time is an element of social life and represents a component of the culture of every day life; it is the “carrier” for cultural values and it determines the quality of life.

With respect to prehistoric times, the researchers have not presented unequivocal theories on spending leisure time. Dependence of the existence of primitive people on natural conditions caused cyclical changes in physical and psychical activity and relax, whereas a decisive role was played by sunrises and sunsets. By day, people collected food, hunted, looked for things; by night, they relaxed. Primitive people spent much time in caves and shelters, relaxing and using food stores [Denek 2010, p. 6].

In ancient times, leisure time was a privilege of higher social circles, contrary to slaves. The privileged spent their leisure time individually or in groups on hiking, racing, excursions, hunting, playing, theatrical spectacles or poetry readings. According to Aristotle, humans should spend leisure time on art, science and philosophy. During the Middle Ages, the forms of holiday were developing regularly and, with the course of time, this habit started to “permeate” to the people of lower social strata. Theatre developed along with development of humanities, literature, art, architecture and music. The onset of feudal economy and social stratification caused that the owners of lands had a lot of leisure time and used the goods of material and spiritual culture and they took part in hunting, revels and competitions. Peasants had little leisure time and used it mainly for relaxing and regeneration of physical strengths. In the Age of Enlightenment, the philosophers started to discuss the problems of leisure time. J. Locke postulates

psychophysical unity of a human and the necessity of caring for physical health and mind and hardening them, whereas D. Diderot argued that leisure time is the most important value of our lives. The focus was not only on human labour but also on the culture of leisure time. Leisure time ceased to concern only the privileged strata; the amount of this time increased and became the privilege of all the members of society. J.A. Komeński stressed the organization of leisure time of children and young people after school activities and demanded that schools should have sports fields, playgrounds, gardens and places adjusted to actively relax and entertain after mental work.

The development of sociology, pedagogy, psychology and economy was followed by the researchers' investigating the problems of leisure time in its various aspects. After the 1st world war, the pursuit of numerous organizations and vocational associations for shortening the working time became a reality. In 1919, the International Trade Union Convention in Washington postulated organization of holiday for employees, which affected the emergence of scientific publications.

In the interwar period, the contemporary forms of spending leisure time started to be developed.

In the Polish People's Republic, the problem of leisure time was regarded as an important element of social policies, which integrated this area of human life. The programmes for minimum leisure time were developed along with a system that organized and encouraged people to participate in group forms of relax, such as package holiday, camps for children and young people and a variety of extracurricular activities financed by the state. The problems of leisure time in those days were the focus of interest of many pedagogues who investigated the process of proper development of the demanded forms of spending leisure time [Dąbrowski 1966, p. 10 and further]. In the early nineties of the 20th century, the problems of leisure time ceased to be the centre of researcher's interest, but in recent years, the need for investigating of leisure time in children and young people and the factors that determine any physical activity started to be emphasized again [Kargul 2001, p. 3].

The concept of leisure time has emerged and was popularized at the moment of its recognition by the UNESCO International Conference in 1957.

## **2. Effect of family environment on development of the forms of spending leisure time in children and young people**

Some studies have demonstrated that Polish children aged 6 to 10 years have on average eight hours of leisure time a day; children aged 11 to 15 have six hours, young people aged 15 to 18 have on average four hours of leisure time [Bykowska, Szymański 2008, p. 63].

These data do not concern all the children since the amount of leisure time is affected by a variety of factors, such as the place of residence, distance from school,

load with learning and home duties (e.g. agricultural duties among rural children), family status, season of the year and sex [Gołębiowska 2010, p. 7].

Undoubtedly, families have a decisive influence on organization and forms of spending leisure time, which depends on the economic status, education and profession of parents and local community the family lives in since children in cities are offered more opportunities for choosing activities in leisure time. The economic status of the family is one of the most important factors that determine the forms of spending leisure time. Sport and recreational equipment, excursions, modern IT devices or collecting things often require substantial financial expenditures.

Another important factor is education and profession of parents and the cultural level of the family. The higher education level of parents corresponds to the higher the awareness of the forms of recreation which are beneficial to children. They can also pass the positive behavioural patterns for leisure time. The profession of parents determines the amount of time they are able to spend with children at participation in the recreational activities. Physical work (often working shifts) of parents causes the fatigue and is not conducive to spending time on activities performed together, and, consequently, children organize their time on their own, without supervision of the adults, which might lead to risky behaviours. Children living in the cities are more at risk of negative forms of spending leisure time, which is connected with higher anonymity and variety of opportunities. These children have also easier access to cultural and entertainment facilities, sports facilities, shopping malls and centres for extracurricular education.

Another category of parents as organizers of leisure time are pathological families, where parents neglect children or are violent and do not participate in organization of leisure time of their children [Pospiszyl 2007, p. 57 and further].

With regard for the functions of leisure time, one should emphasize the creative function, which consists in meeting the needs of self-realization of an individual, development of the person's interests and aspirations, skills and abilities as well as identification and development of talents. The caring function results from the fast rate of socio-cultural changes, disorganization of family environment, unemployment, deficiency of the school system and a variety of pathological phenomena which often occur in the contemporary world. The objective of this function is to help young people meet their needs, prevent the factors which might put their health or lives at risk and to stimulate equalization of developmental deficiencies. The environmental and integration function is aimed at extending and strengthening motivation for starting cultural and educational activities, improving the pedagogical culture in local societies, integration of peer communities, preventing isolation and anonymity, whereas the recreational function is expected to offer relax and entertainment [Rechnio 2004, pp. 9–13].

One of the most obvious functions of leisure time is relax, i.e. overall regeneration of the body. When “combating” the fatigue, people attempt to relax from stressful

situations using various coping strategies, which are highly individualized. Meeting the needs for entertainment stimulates a pleasant emotional state, happiness and satisfaction. During leisure time, children and young people are able to develop their interests and passions, deepen their knowledge, experience aesthetic sensations and be involved in artistic activities.

In order to spend leisure time effectively, one should connect the lifestyle of an individual with their personality traits and ensure the conditions for the choice of the form of activity. The basic role is played by families, who help make right choices, provide behavioural patterns and teach how to make independent decisions concerning recreation.

Nowadays, one of the most common forms of spending leisure time is using the Internet and computer games. Many pedagogues indicate the phenomenon of becoming addicted to electronic media [Danowski, Krupińska 2007, p. 5 and further], which generates the likelihood of risky behaviours. Children, as inexperienced and unaware participants of the virtual reality are often the recipients of the negative contents in the Internet, such as pornography, aggression, violence, or paedophilia. A particularly worrying phenomenon is popularization of cyberbullying in the Internet, i.e. the films which are aimed to ridicule, humiliate and harm other people. In 2007, the Foundation "Dzieci Niczyje" ("Unowned Children") carried out the first survey in Poland concerning the phenomenon of peer bullying using electronic media, which showed that every second young person (52%) had experienced verbal violence in the Internet, calling their names, threatening and blackmailing. Over half of the people aged 12 to 17 in the survey had fallen at least once the prey of the films and photographs and compromising materials prepared against their will [Stasiński, Chodkiewicz 2004, p. 44].

The recreational family programs deserve the particular attention. They are organized in local communities by different educational and cultural institutions, schools or parishes. The responsibility of the creators and implementers of recreational programmes lies in making people aware of the health risks that result from fatigue and deficiency of movement, pedagogization of parents in terms of the need for organization of leisure time of children and young people, and passing the elementary knowledge on physical culture, sport, recreation and tourism to parents.

It is essential to teach children and parents athletic and recreational skills during competition, feasts, festivals and development of the interest in family forms of recreational, athletic and artistic activity. The main aims of family educational programmes is to instil the skills of using the opportunities offered by proper management of leisure time in performing the family functions i.e. health, socialization, cultural and emotional function and development of the skills of relaxing, playing, caring for health as well as integration and strengthening the family ties in order to prevent social pathologies ([www.sciaga.pl](http://www.sciaga.pl)).

The survey discussed in the above study was carried out among 150 students of grade 6 of the primary school in rural environment and 120 students from the urban environment. Its aim was to collect information about the forms of spending leisure time and participation of parents in organization of this time. The analysis of the data shows that the amount of leisure time depends on the day of the week and load with activities. In working days, children from both environments had on average 2 hours of leisure time, whereas at weekends, they had ca. 4 to 5 hours. Among the forms of spending leisure time, the students from the rural environments reported: watching the TV (90%), sport activities and holiday (70%), reading books and journals (66%), listening to the music (60%), computer activities (40%), going out with friends (38%), manual works (18%) and sleeping (16%). The most frequent form of leisure time was going out with friends (70%), participation in entertainment and recreation (65%), listening to the music (48%) and computer activities (43%). Young people in rural areas spent less time compared to those from urban areas at reading books (31%) and DIY activities (18%). In the cities, young people watched the TV (51%): they prefer musical channels and films.

The television programs which were most frequently watched by girls included (54%), educational programs (30%), information programs (16%), whereas among boys, these were: films (68%), entertainment (18%) and information programs (16%). The least interest was reported for quiz shows (4%) and journalistic programs.

Among the sports which were preferred in the environments surveyed, the most popular included (28%, 25%) basketball and volleyball (14%, 13%), whereas the least popular were running (8%, 7%) and swimming (4%, 3%). With regard for reading in leisure time, the most of the students from the cities read school set books (30%) and youth magazines (12%). Daily newspapers were read by 6% people from the urban environment. Rural young people rarely read magazines and daily papers.

Analysis of participation of parents in organization of leisure time of children in both environments shows that only half of parents took part in such activities and helped them organize activities. These included watching films (34%), going to the cinemas (34%), walking and visiting friends (26%) but these are only passive methods of spending leisure time. The highest contribution to organization of leisure time for schoolchildren in the rural environment was from school, which proposed a variety of forms of extracurricular activities and activities outside schools. The special interest groups were also present at schools, with the activities which were attractive for young people, e.g. dancing classes with participation of 60% of the young people studied, sports groups (50%), arts groups (10%), historical, biological and mathematical groups (ca. 6% each). The rich offer of extracurricular classes (cinema, theatre, swimming pool, cycling and hiking)

shows that the major effect on formation of the models of spending leisure time in rural area was from school, with insignificant influence of parents.

In the urban environment, the biggest effect on the choice of the forms of spending leisure time was from family and peer group and local mass media. Radio, television and local press also provided information about events which young people like taking part in. Despite the rich offer at schools, rural young people participated in activities organized outside schools less frequently. When asked "Does it happen that you don't know what to do in your leisure time?", some 74% of young people from rural areas and 72% of those from cities answered that it happens very often since they cannot find an interesting offer or it is connected with the distance and burdensome commuting.

The strongest effect on the choice of the offer of spending leisure time was from interests (63%). 9% of the respondents followed the fashionable tendencies in these terms, with barely 3% pointing to parents as advisers and even fewer people mentioning teachers.

Similar patterns were found in urban areas, with the most of the young people being driven by interests (58%) and fashionable tendencies in the group of peers (17%).

Professional and regular activities in leisure time are a perfect educational resource to supplement caring and educational work of schools, which affects the comprehensive development of personality of children and young people.

### **Conclusion**

Leisure time plays an important role in psychophysical and social growth of children and young people. Numerous studies have demonstrated that forms of activities in leisure time are highly individualized and depend on many factors. The fundamental role in establishment of models of good management of leisure time is played by parents and other members of family, their lifestyles, cultural level, interests, and the level of activity and integration with the environment.

Good families influence children in a multifaceted manner through emotional, rational, conscious and purposive activities and modelling behaviours, social and hygienic standards and recreational behaviours [Cudak 2007, p. 165].

Nowadays, the family crisis can be observed (with the factor that demonstrates the crisis being high unemployment rate and increase in pathological phenomena) but the contemporary school has also difficulties in achieving the important goal of instilling the ideas of active recreation in young people. Unattractive physical education lessons discourage children and young people from participation. Lack of attractive curricula in schools causes that the habits of passive spending leisure time are established in young people.

Some authors emphasize that family relax is determined by family centrism i.e. tendency for spending leisure time in families, shutting from the external world

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and creation of a specific home selfishness and domesticated culture. Furthermore, the researchers in this field point to mediatization of family relax, which means a predominant contribution of media in the family life. A worrying fact is passive leisure time, which is non-selective, deprived of reflection and the reception of the content. This pattern is absorbed by children and young people. Around 77% of young people in the period of adolescence spend their leisure time watching TV for around 3 to 4 hours a day [Wolan-Nowakowska 2006, pp. 62–67].

The well-organized family, characterized by planning, regularity, diligence, persistence, clear division of roles, rights and duties represent a beneficial educational environment and teaches children rationally plan their leisure time. Obviously, the choice of activities the child wants to be involved in depends on their interests and hobbies, which helps reveal and develop its abilities, meet the creative needs, develop social activity, ability to cooperate and coexist in groups.

In present reality, children often spend their leisure time without parents and their supervision; overworked and absent parents are not interested in what their children do, which results in loosening of family ties and the risk of pathological behaviours.

Spending leisure time together is a good method of family integration and passing educational values and special skills through playing and movement games. Recreation with families is a pleasant and useful educational resource which is highly appreciated by pedagogues.

However, few parents are taking part in organization of leisure time for their children, with the decisive role played by school, particularly in rural areas where no attractive activities are organized for children and young people. Spending leisure time in family should meet several educational functions, provide chances for development and education and offer opportunities to meet psychological needs through being conducive to familiarizing with yourself and establish values and goals in life. Active forms of relax are also important to integration of the family, formation of the sense of community and association. Undoubtedly, current status of the studies demonstrates that the behaviour patterns for leisure time are not conducive to full development of children and young people.

**Abstract:** Sociocultural changes that have occurred in the contemporary world cause changes in lifestyles and ways of spending leisure time. This problem is particularly important from the pedagogical standpoint since it substantially affects young generations who follow the models from a variety of sources. However, the strongest effect on the forms of activity and development of recreational behaviours in leisure time is from family.

Contemporary children and young people are overloaded with school duties, extra-curricular activities to increase knowledge, private lessons that prepare for attractive university courses and they often have to work. This negatively affects the amount, organization, content and forms of spending leisure time, which is the precondition for proper psychophysical and social growth of children.

**Keywords:** leisure time, leisure time functions, recreation, family, behaviour patterns

**Streszczenie:** Przemiany społeczno-obyczajowe, zachodzące we współczesnym świecie powodują zmiany w stylu życia i sposobie spędzania czasu wolnego. Problem ten jest szczególnie ważny z punktu widzenia pedagogicznego, ponieważ dotyczy młodego pokolenia, które czerpie wzorce z wielu źródeł, jednak największy wpływ na formy aktywności i kształtowanie zachowań rekreacyjnych w czasie wolnym ma rodzina.

Współczesne dzieci i młodzież obciążone są nadmiarem obowiązków szkolnych, dodatkowymi zajęciami wzbogacającymi wiedzę, korepetycjami, przygotowującymi do podjęcia atrakcyjnych studiów, często pracą zarobkową. Wpływa to ujemnie na ilość, organizację, treść i formy spędzania czasu wolnego, który jest niezbędnym elementem prawidłowego rozwoju psychofizycznego i społecznego dzieci.

**Słowa kluczowe:** czas wolny, funkcje czasu wolnego, rekreacja, rodzina, wzorce zachowań.

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