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## Parent's professional activity and the shape of the contemporary family in the era of rapid social and economic transformation

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## **Parent's Professional Activity and the Shape of the Contemporary Family in the Era of Rapid Social and Economic Transformation**

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### **Introduction**

The family, the commune of life, is created and functions in the social, economic and political reality of a given period, which shapes its form, structure and the quality of care, upbringing and socialization of children and adolescents. This reality poses specific challenges and threats. "Every generation must face 'its' reality and its particular challenges" (Wójcik, 2008, p. 7). The article attempts to arrive at a diagnosis of the shape of the contemporary family and the tendencies within the area of family life in a period of rapid economic, civilizational and cultural transformation of societies. The professional career of parents is an important element shaping this reality, and a significant factor that can be used to interpret and search for solutions within the area of numerous contemporary social issues, including the economic crisis and family stability, and its ability to perform care and rearing functions. From the methodological perspective, the article offers a synthetic review of the subject literature and engages in constructive criticism.

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### **The individual and family dimensions of the professional activity**

Work is an important phenomenon both in the history of mankind, as it covers all generations of all people in all times and on all levels of economic and cultural development, as well as in the history of individuals, as it is an indicator of human existence, a crucial element of everyday life and a source of dignity. Together with entertainment, curiosity and learning, it is a basic form of human activity and is a significant part of human existence. It is distinguished from other forms of activity by its results: the effect of work is a product (material or not) used by a worker or other people (Oleksi, Szabała-Walczyk, pp. 41–42). The agent of work is always a human being, who, in a planned and deliberate way, transforms the world in order to satisfy his needs and realize his humanity.

Human work is understood as a social and individual value. On the one hand, it is a social value because the worker contributes to the social and economic development of the world and “thanks to work and with its help a social bond between people is created” (Wyszyński, 1957, p. 35). On the other hand, it is an individual value, because it allows the worker to develop and excel by becoming more human (John Paul II, LE 9; Doniec, 2001, p. 103), and it also perfects things and surroundings. If work is to be perceived as a value in these dimensions, it cannot be enforced, but must be undertaken willingly. Coercion, in contrast, is a threat to human dignity and freedom (Błasiak, 2002, p. 91). Additionally, “human work cannot be treated only as an element necessary for production – the so called workforce. A person cannot be seen as a production tool. A person is the creator of work and its doer. Work should not lose its dignity. The central element within work – any work – is a human being. Thanks to work people should perfect and deepen their personality. We should not forget (...) that work is for people, and not that people are for work” (John Paul II, 1997, p. 55). This last statement is especially acute if we bear in mind current economic transformations. Moreover, the importance of “work as a value depends on the role and importance a person assigns to it. To a great extent it is conditioned by the personality type

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of a person, his socialization in family, his vocational training, his level of education, his social background and the type of work he does”(Doniec, 2001, p. 103).

In education, work is not treated as an instinctive behaviour or a source of pleasure. It is an activity which depends on the person's capabilities, knowledge and willingness, which leads to the creation of objectively valuable works (Nowacki, 2008, p. 76).

On the one hand, work is a means to life; it is a source used to satisfy material needs. In this case, it is treated instrumentally, because it helps to achieve concrete life goals, including supporting the family, and hence widespread efforts to obtain well-paid jobs. From this perspective, this value is economic in nature. On the other hand, work can be treated as a means which leads to fulfilling one's higher needs, such as self-realization, development, perfecting talents and interests, or serving others. In this case, a job leads to a career, power and social prestige. These criteria endow work with an autotelic sense (Doniec, 2001, p. 103).

A professional career and family are interconnected and influence each other. As far as family life is concerned, work can be viewed from two perspectives: as a phenomenon allowing people to live and support their family, and as a factor allowing them to fulfil family goals, including child-rearing. These two issues remain tightly correlated. However, work in the broader sense refers to the whole society and nation (John Paul II, LE 10). It is important for both sets of values – one connected with work and the other connected with family – “to be joined and to permeate each other in an appropriate way. In a way, work and the money it brings are conditions necessary to start and support a family. Work and diligence also influence the whole process of child-rearing in the family because ‘everyone becomes a human being’ also as a result of work, and the process of becoming a human being is the foremost aim of the process of bringing up children” (John Paul II, LE 10). That is why it can be stated that “a family is (...) a community which can exist thanks to work, and it is also the first internal school of work for everybody” (John Paul II, LE 10).

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### **Women's professional activity as a contemporary tendency**

Significant changes in the contemporary family are connected with the fact that women undertake professional careers. Their work is a basic feature and a stable tendency in family life. For many women work means more than just a source of money: it gives them satisfaction, allows them to develop themselves and influence their surrounding reality. Work contributes to the rising social position of women, as they now take active part in public and social life and become involved in various non-personal activities, which broadens their life perspectives and allows for self-realization. The consequences of professional work are also visible in the area of personal life. Women have gained financial independence from their husbands/partners, and can satisfy their needs by themselves; they can develop their interests and increase their self-esteem, responsibility and safety. As far as the family is concerned, women's work and salaries substantially contribute to family budgets. In many cases, it is a financial necessity. Additionally, women's professional activities have enforced changes in men's attitude towards them. Men have been forced to undertake various household chores and family duties which used to be undertaken by women. However, women's work also entails certain negative aspects, in most cases connected with the lack of proper care of children (nowadays various institutions took over many duties connected with child care and upbringing), faulty organization of family life, the lack of time, stress, emotional tensions, marital and family conflicts, and problems with maintaining a proper balance between work and family duties. It should be added that "at present work is highly intellectualized in nature and entails continuous learning, keeping up-to date and upgrading qualifications" (Biedroń, 2009, p. 44), which requires time and involvement from parents.

Women's economic autonomy has shifted the traditional position of men in the family and society. Gradually women are beginning to be perceived as equal and independent partners of their husbands in all areas of marital and family life. A husband-father has ceased to be the central figure in the family, and he has lost his authority. In the context of these

phenomena, a theory of competitiveness has been put forward, which indicates the existence of rivalry between spouses/partners over the position and authority in the family or in other social relations (Biedroń, 2009, p. 49). Women's economic autonomy has also led to changes in other areas of marital and family life. M. Biedroń points at the economic emancipation of various family members, including children, which is "visible not only in separate bank accounts, but also in not revealing how much money is deposited in them. Pre-nuptial contracts, prepared in case a marriage ends, are becoming increasingly common nowadays, as they allow partners to regain their investment. Consumerism prompts people to spend more and more time earning money at the expense of many traditional values" (Biedroń, 2009, p. 49).

Due to the phenomena and tendencies indicated above, household chores are now perceived as less valuable than a professional career. As a result, women who give up their jobs and stay at home taking care of children feel undervalued, and often experience frustration and a lack of satisfaction. Moreover, some people think they waste their lives and are unsuccessful.

To summarize, it should be stated that the most "widespread model of a wife and mother nowadays promotes combining family life and professional duties: being a co-bread winner, carer and the organizer of family life and, at the same time, performing social and professional duties, and enriching them with valuable female qualities, such as sensitivity, warmth, aestheticism, and intuition" (Doniec, 2001, p. 105).

### **Models of personal and family lives in the context of socio-economic transformations**

Family, which has existed from time immemorial, is a dynamic system, which undergoes continuous evolution. Its history indicates that its structure, function, and the roles of its members change over time. These alterations have been dictated mostly by economic and cultural changes and the advancement of technology. According to A. Toffler's theory

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(Toffler, 1985), the model of the nuclear family prevails nowadays, which is a direct result of the emergence of industrial society, defined by industrialization and urbanization. People migrated from villages to cities to look for jobs and upgrade their socio-economic situation. Consequently, a breakdown of the multi-generation family took place (Wawrzyniak-Kostrowicka, 2009, p. 59). The electronic era of today<sup>1</sup> has been shaped by the advancement of technology and professional requirements which impose limits on family life and impede the development of intimate bonds with others (Wawrzyniak-Kostrowicka, 2009, p. 59). Thus, a two-generation family dominates, which is a small and carefully planned family, consisting of a married couple and one or two children. It is a self-sufficient community, financially self-reliant, living in a flat belonging to them, and independent from neighbours and local communities. It is also characterized by a narrow circle of friends and acquaintances and blood relations restricted to the closest family.

In Poland, which is an urban-industrial society, the prevalent model is the so-called modified extended family. There are two variants of this model: the first one, in which the biological family and the reproductive family live together under one roof but are financially independent and have separate households; and the second one, in which both families live separately but maintain close and strong relations and help each other on regular basis (Doniec, 2001, pp. 15, 17, 30).

A dominating tendency to have a small family contributes to diminishing acceptance towards families with more than two children, which are stereotypically associated with poverty and pathology. This is an extremely harmful view of such families. Moreover, numerous advantages of being raised within a big family are hardly ever mentioned.

The transformations taking place nowadays in the economic and civilizational areas of life frequently make family life subordinate to professional life, which continuously places higher and higher demands on employees connected with their mobility, availability, and upgrading

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<sup>1</sup> This period is also described as *the third wave society* according to A. Toffler and *the postmodern era* according to Z. Bauman.

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their qualifications. "Expectations regarding the quality of life and interpersonal relations change alongside upgraded qualifications, professional development, and the increase of the social position. An individual who wants to reach a standard of life adequate to his needs is forced to comply to his employer's requirements and adjust his personal life to suit his work. At the same time, he sacrifices his personal life and family bonds to the desire of professional development and social prestige. On the one hand, members of this information society are forced to conform to work requirements, and, on the other hand, they are unwilling to resign from the profits connected with the change of lifestyle, even at the expense of stabilizing their personal spheres" (Wawrzyniak-Kostrowicka, 2009, p. 60).

Placing a professional career over self-realization and comfort is a significant tendency in the life of a contemporary person. It is connected with widespread respect towards individualism. This is why an individual often faces a dilemma: self-realization versus life with others and for others. Unfortunately, the latter often loses. As a result, the number of divorces and separations, as well as the number of children born out of wedlock, are increasing, while the number of marriages and the fertility rate are decreasing, and the decision to have the first child is taken later in life than ever before. New models of life are emerging, such as: diasporic families, multifamily families, long-distance families (LAP or LAT), cohabiting, expats, or singles (Wawrzyniak-Kostrowicka, 2009, pp. 59–61; Błasiak, 2012, pp. 87–106).

A high number of divorces results in the development of other forms of family. Divorcees marry again. "A cluster of several families arising as a result of marriages and divorces is called a multifamily family. Spouses in this model must fulfil the roles earlier played by someone else. Children from former marriages find it especially hard to adapt to new conditions and new persons in the family" (Wawrzyniak-Kostrowicka, 2009, p. 61). This situation influences not only the functioning of the family but also the development and upbringing of children. Divorcing and re-marrying lead to a widening of the circle of adults who take part in the upbringing and socializing of children in various periods of their lives and to various extents.

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A high percentage of couples cohabit in different forms. One of them is called LAT (*Living Apart Together*) or LAP (*Lebensadschnittspartner*), which means being together but living apart (Wawrzyniak-Kostrowicka, 2009, p. 62). Another is called LIL (*Love in Lover*), which means being with someone you love but living apart (Jucewicz, 2010, p. 238). In such situations people treat each other as life partners, yet they live separately. This form is particularly popular among young people deeply involved in their professional careers, although such pattern is not unheard of among middle-aged or elderly couples. It can be found among couples in which both partners are financially independent, have their own flats and daily routines which they do not want to sacrifice, and that is why that cannot imagine sharing their space with someone else and giving up their daily habits (Wawrzyniak-Kostrowicka, 2009, p. 62). "There are also rare instances of marriages, sometimes even with children, who live in a big house (or flat) divided into sovereign zones and furnished according to the person's likes or dislikes. (...) This model of marriage can be called LTA; that is, *Living Together Apart*" (Biedroń, 2009, p. 50).

Nowadays, corporations shape family life to a great extent, enforcing a life model called *expats*. This term describes people who work in corporations and travel all over the world to expand their company (hence the name of this model) into new markets. The inconveniences associated with this kind of lifestyle are compensated by a very high standard of living. Such workers travel alone or with their families. If they travel with families, the negative consequences of the incessant changes of the place of living take their toll in the area of children's development. Specialists talk about the TCK syndrome (*Third Culture Kids*) found among those children, which manifests itself mostly by the lack of a sense of belonging and loneliness, high degrees of tolerance, flexibility and openness towards other people. When expats travel alone, their marriages often collapse, and children suffer the negative consequences (Wawrzyniak-Kostrowicka, 2009, p. 62) of living in an apparently full family, but, in fact, a single parent family.

As a result of widespread job migration, diasporic families/marriages are gaining in popularity. They are often called weekend families/marriages, because spouses /family members are physically separated as they

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work in another city or even another country. They are together only at weekends (Jucewicz, 2010, p. 239) or during the holidays.

The data available indicate that the number of childless marriages (Szumilas, 2008, pp. 91–100) is increasing. Such marriages can be divided into three groups: couples who do not want children yet and who postpone the decision of having children until later when it will be more convenient. It might be connected with their financial situation (the lack of money, the lack of a flat, a flat that is too small, a mortgage to pay off) or with their need for comfort, indecisiveness, a professional career or education. Such couples take the decision concerning procreation rationally and calculate the best moment for a child based on their financial situation. From this perspective, having a child is a conscious choice in the process of family planning (Przybył, 2000, pp. 83–95).

The second group consists of people who do not want to have children at all; that is, families who voluntarily resign from having children because of various reasons (Przybył, 2000, pp. 83–95). This group includes a contemporary family model called DINKS (*Double Income No Kids*) (Biedroń, 2009, p. 49). Such couples are mostly found among well-to-do inhabitants of big cities, and their decision not to have children is based on hedonism, individualism and egoism. Such marriages are focused on the couple's own development, careers and achieving high positions, which is connected with frequent changes in their place of work, and fulfilling their needs to maintain a high standard of life. Children are an obstacle when it comes to achieving these goals (Jucewicz, 2010, p. 238).

The last group includes marriages who do not have children because they cannot have them. They want to have children, try to have them, but, because of age and infertility, are unsuccessful in their attempts (Przybył, 2000, pp. 83–95).

On the basis of the above considerations, it can be concluded that socio-economic transformations have resulted in significant changes in the internal and external structure of the family. As far as the external structure is concerned, the family is smaller now than in the past, the intergeneration dependence has disappeared, while the autonomy and

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independence of the family has increased. It is a closed group, hardly linked with external structures, but strongly protecting its intimacy and independence. As far as the internal structure is concerned, it is internally coherent and strongly oriented towards expressing its members' personalities. The changes also cover the relations between family members, which are now of a more democratic nature; personal bonds dominate over material ones, and the emotional function prevails (Doniec, 2001, pp. 16–19). This is especially true of a marriage, which now has an egalitarian nature resulting from the unification of male and female roles, and the principle of equality between them. Marital and parental duties are divided between spouses on the basis of partnership, and this partnership is based on patterns of behaviour mutually worked out and on a strong emotional bond built on respect and responsibility (Błasiak, [no year], p. 327). Getting married is mostly motivated by love, which is an important objective and value, and the foundation of marital success. Love usually originates in infatuation "which is (...) a passing emotion. That is why, to take good care of their relationship, spouses should work on themselves to transform infatuation into love – the attitude which is conducive to building common 'us' and leads to genuine friendship between spouses, which can be displayed by permission to be oneself, kindness, openness, and willingness to stick to each other no matter what happens. (...) Love between spouses is active and dynamic, and it undergoes constant changes. That is why its quality depends on spouses' personal maturity and sensitivity to each other and to oneself" (Błasiak, [no year], p. 328). Consequently, nowadays a marital bond (Błasiak, 2010, pp. 129–142) is based on personal values, mainly love. It has become deformalized. Authority in the family (Błasiak, 2010, pp. 89–96) is also shaped on the basis of love and the principle of love and concern. The power depends on the predispositions and abilities of family members. These changes triggered the metamorphosis of the nature and extent of parental roles. Clear-cut norms and rigid family roles no longer exist, as they can be negotiated, and there is no division into male and female duties. Both parents are actively engaged in the upbringing of their children, and seek to satisfy not only their children's biological needs but also

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psychosocial ones. Parents pay great attention to the comprehensive development of their children, and the aim of upbringing is the child's happiness. It is connected with the fact that the position of a child in the family has changed. It is now higher than ever before. A child is treated as an autotelic value, not an instrumental one. The lack of distance between parents and children is clearly visible, and their relations are based upon partnership and friendship. Children have been freed from arbitrary parental rule. Autonomization of family members is another change in the internal structure of the family. It has taken place as a result of the dominance of individualism in a postmodern society, and that is why family members are first of all directed towards satisfying their own needs and the realization of their personal goals. Autonomization of an individual and the individualization of the person's mentality have resulted in the emergence of a new way of thinking about the reality and the family. These tendencies have been triggered by the professional activation of a wife-mother and the increase of her social position (Doniec, 2001, pp. 30–31).

Parents' professional activity and the economic situation of a contemporary family are connected with one more phenomenon: children's late financial independence. The bases of this phenomenon are a lengthened period of education, the economic crisis (problems with finding a satisfying job), and a liberal style of child-rearing, which discourages young people from an independent life. They do not want to live on their own because they are 'served' by caring and overprotective parents, and are not obliged to do any household chores, nor to comply with any directives or prohibitions. They live in the "Mommy Hotel", as if they were princes in royal courts. In such circumstances they have neither reason nor motivation to begin and continue self-supporting lives (Biedroń, 2009, p. 49).

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### **Problems in the family in the context of parents' professional activity**

The negative civilizational changes connected with the parents' professional activities which influence family life include unemployment, work migration and Euro-orphanhood.

Nowadays the economic situation of the family is not stable, and depends on parents' professional activity carried out in institutions outside families. The lack of stability is deepened by the economic crisis, entailing problems in the area of employment. Having no job or working part-time results in financial problems, which enforce changes in the lifestyle of a family affected by them. It is necessary to limit spending and reduce material needs, even the most basic ones. There must be cuts on leisure activities, cultural life, social life and extracurricular activities for children. The nature of contacts inside the family changes. As a result, the family loses its caring and educational agency and experiences devastating effects in the emotional, expressive and social areas (Najder, 2009, pp. 241, 242).

Unemployment data indicate that the situation in Poland is difficult<sup>2</sup>. This problem affects the whole world, including countries belonging to the European Union. Unemployment is accompanied by parents' job migration, as problems with finding employment or meagre earnings force many people to leave their country and live abroad, which takes its toll on the permanence of the family and the quality of its caring, educational and socializing interactions.

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<sup>2</sup> "In January 2012 the number of the registered unemployed exceeded 2 million. The number increased by almost 140,000 in comparison to December 2011. The unemployment rate in January 2012 equalled 13.3% and was higher by 0.8 percent than in December 2011. The increase of the unemployment rate was observed in all voivodeships". J. Mazur, *Praca kluczem polityki rodzinnej*, in: *Dokąd zmierzasz, współczesna rodzino?* Ed. M. Duda, A. Świerczek, Wydawnictwo św. Stanisława BM Archidiecezji Krakowskiej, Kraków, (no year), p. 355.

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## **Conclusions**

To conclude, it can be claimed that the family unceasingly remains a valid research issue and is thus analysed from various perspectives. It is the natural and the most significant environment for the development of new generations. It is affected by numerous positive and negative changes resulting from global transformations. The family exerts its influence on a child no matter whether it is a valuable or dysfunctional environment. That is why it is vital to identify factors leading to dysfunctions within the family in order to take preventive and corrective measures when needed. In this context, a diagnosis of changes in the area of parents' professional activity seems significant. Such changes are connected with civilizational and economic transformations and, to a great extent, influence the shape of marital and family life, and the functioning of a family as a caring and rearing environment. The conversion of the family covers structural changes, functions in the family, and the roles and positions of family members. As a result, various mosaic and often disintegrated forms of personal and family life can be found in contemporary societies. Thus professional educational activities, based on a reliable diagnosis, ought to aim to maintain the stability of the family, which should satisfy common human needs and correctly fulfil its functions, as well as aiding parents, who should be able to function effectively in this new, often difficult, reality.

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### **Summary**

The socio-economic transformations taking place in the contemporary world condition the shape of the family and the quality of the process of the development, upbringing and socialization of the youngest generation. Family life has become subordinate to a professional career, which is an important factor in these transformations. The assumption that a properly functioning family is the best environment for child-rearing, as it provides stimuli necessary for children's harmonious and comprehensive development, leads to the diagnosis of the changes affecting the family. Such a diagnosis should serve as the basis for educational activities supporting contemporary parenthood.

**Keywords:** professional activity, models of personal and family life, socio-economic transformations

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