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The Condition Of Contemporary Family Caught Up In The Context Of Society Of Risk

Abstract: Many scientists are consistent as to the fact that Polish society early twenty-first century is a society of risk in almost all areas of life. The risk areas relate primarily to personal safety and the public, falling levels of growth, stratification in different spheres of life. This risk is compounded differently understood and subject to different terms related to the implementation of freedom and liberalism, tolerance and pluralism, resourcefulness and market economy. In such a society, developing a family becomes a family risk. As a direct threat generating family risk could include: poverty, homelessness, unemployment, separation as a result of emigration, the liberalization of views in the field of moral - ethical manifested in the increase in the number of divorces and single-parent families and the ruthless market economy.

Keywords: family risk, hazard risk generating family

Today's world is marked by the uncertainty of tomorrow. We are alone caught in a rushing crowd, always hurried up somewhere, and finally we constantly do not have enough time. In that pursuit we often forget to stop for a moment to catch the breath, contemplate and calm down. People may think that being in constant motion indicates the fact that they live. It becomes a kind of defense against stagnation and immobility which remind them of death. The twenty-first century person is always active, constantly seeking for something, that self has a purpose. However, the aims are moving, and the self cannot achieve the so desired satisfaction, thus the modern "homo eligens" chooses another aims hoping to achieve the happiness. Unfortunately, in this race, he or she often forgets what is the most important - the loved ones. The world of consumption deceives and

tempts us every day by its “wonders”, it attracts and stimulates our desires, thus generating new ones, “necessary” ones to satisfy the needs without which life seems basically pointless. Overwhelming consumption has become a reality and a trend attracting millions of lives. It is a new religion whose followers can be found around the globe. Erich Fromm’s existential question “to have or to be?”, for most people has been narrowed to simpler claim of “having is to be” in the sense “I have therefore I am.” We surround ourselves with different things, one can say that mobile phones and computers have basically dominated our lives. Zygmunt Bauman writes that “the notion of virtual intimacy has made the relations between people more frequent, albeit shallower; more intense, but shorter, they have become too short and shallow, so it is difficult for them to a serious bound. (...) The more attention and effort are consumed by virtual kind of intimacy, the less time is spend on the acquisition and development of the skills required for other non-virtual forms of intimacy “[2003, p.162, 165].

Sociologists are loudly announcing the crisis of the interpersonal relations. The ongoing process of globalization and its impact are visible in every area of life. In certain countries one can notice a variety of tensions and conflicts of a social, religious, political or economic nature which result in destabilizing the social and family life. Nobody is surprised of every day bringing news about the military conflicts, new epidemics or ecological threats. Due to the overwhelming power of the media we become participants in these events, sitting comfortably in front of our TVs. Threats of all kinds has dominated our lives, therefore Ulrich Beck argues that we live in a society of risk or even in a society of higher risk accompanying the new technologies created by people (for example, genetic experiments or chemical industry). That risk is universal in its scope, affecting individuals, groups and societies. It is evident in every area of our lives [Benton and Craib 2003]. We deal with the risk society when its transitions, existing mechanisms and institutions threaten the citizens, potentially or actually to a large extent, thus generating uncertainty about the future. Today, this concept also applies to the mechanisms that cause various negative results in the modern communities, regions, enclaves or family groups and individual person’s life [Kawula 2003].

The risk has become a central feature of societies of our era, or, as Anthony Giddens calls it “late modernity”, which takes the extreme form of modernity with the most vivid features. Basically, late modernity is characterized by:

1. requirements of confidence in the technical and organizational systems of great complexity
2. new dimensions of risk, especially those produced in the course of social and technological changes
3. incoherence, opacity and uncertainty of social life
4. increasing globalization of political, economic, and cultural nature

(P. Sztompka, 2002).

Uncertainty and risk affect all areas of human life. They concern not only the risk of contact with the natural surrounding, but also the one of social or technical nature, created by human [ibid.]. "These new risk factors create the dark side of modernity and they will be present as long as modernity lasts. Being difficult to predict and concerned as the side-effects, today's risks or similar ones will be invariably accompanying the rapid social and technological changes." [Giddens, 2006, p.168]

Living in the world of "manufactured risk" becomes the price of civilization and technological progress. In the objective sense it is "a global expansion of the risks" affecting millions of people, succumbing to universality, crossing frontiers, as well as the class and level divisions. In the subjective sense, the risk is associated with the increased perception and consciousness concerning threats. The media "attack" us with news on disasters, epidemics, accidents dazzling with horror and generating new areas of uncertainty. The increasing level of mass education sensitize many people on previously overlooked problems of the modern world. The awareness about the helplessness experts is increased, and other examples of their failures cause merely more anxiety which challenges the previously boundless confidence in the technique or medicine. [cf. Sztompka 2002, p. 577]

The critical period of the late XX century and the transition into the XXI century was marked by a deeper reflection on the kind and future of human life. The concept of postmodern society proposed by Zygmunt Bauman is insightful but bitter and ironic at times. It is a reflection on modern person and society in general. Postmodern life is according to Bauman the life in ambivalence. It seems that the leading idea of that concept is the emergence of an entirely new social quality, a new spirit of individual and social freedom including the possibility of making free choices among the variety and multiplicity of lifestyles or, as the author puts it, among the so-called. personal projects that we can change again and again, whenever we want. Bauman claims that: "The today's world seems to be at odds against confidence. Time after time it exposes the continuing variability of the rules and the fragility of any bounds (...). Houses are no longer the warm islands of intimacy on the quickly cooling seas of privacy. They have lost their character of the peaceful areas of love and friendship which used to bound people close to each other; instead homes have turned into the places of territorial struggles. They are no longer the areas which create communities, they have become the place full of fortified bunkers "[Bauman 2003, pp. 164-165].

In a 2001 report, "The Future of the World", there was a brief, pessimistic vision of disintegration and breaking basic human relations at the beginning of the third millennium. We can read that the basic values, namely trust and loyalty. are disappearing,. We are becoming a society based on "the logic of selective ensemble", divisions and desegregation [Mayor 2001]. That process also applies to modern families, often broken under the pressure of such "selective ensemble"

[Kawula 2003].

Many sociologists agree that the Polish society of the beginning of the XXI century is the society of risk in almost all areas of life. The areas of risk primarily relate to the personal safety and the public one; the decreasing level of natural population and the stratification in different areas of life. That risk is compounded by terms which are differently understood and subjected to a different realization; terms related to freedom and liberalism, tolerance and pluralism, resourcefulness and the market economy [ibid.].

In such developing society the families also become the families of risk. As a direct threat generating the family of risk we might point: poverty, homelessness, unemployment, separation as a result of emigration, the liberalization of views in the moral/ethical area - manifested in the increasing number of divorces and single parent families, and the ruthless market economy [Kawula, 2002a].

Many Polish families function in the field of higher risk as a result of material situation. Poverty affects the individual, marks one, stigmatize one, pushes to the margins of society, and in consequence excludes the individual from active participation in a civilization based on the consumption. These people are expendable, unwanted and unneeded.

The problem of excluding the individuals from the social structures of functioning is the area of concern of Bauman's works. The author points out that in today's globalized world, we are dealing with the division for people in the elite and those who are not elite and will never be. For the latter, Bauman coined the accurate term. He refers to them as "destined for grist," "waste-people", "people-rejects", people whose destiny is populating more and more territories of people-rubbish dumps [Bauman 2007]. Those people usually do not have a sufficient power to independently change the situation in which they have found themselves. They need help and support that will reborn the desire of life and restore hope in its meaning. I believe that such help should be focused on learning "to act independently" and to exit from the crisis.

Apart from poverty, the another problem is the one responsible for it- unemployment, which affects a large number of Polish families. The problem of unemployment has many negative consequences on the whole family. It interferes and sometimes even prevents the realization of family's basic functions and tasks. The effects of unemployment are painfully felt in the implementation of economic and consumptive features and functions of the family and in the care and education functions, thus often causing lower educational aspirations of children from the families affected by that problem. It is also not conducive into carrying out an extremely important function which is the feeling of safety within the family. Moreover, unemployment which lasts too long contributes to the escalation of conflict and increases mutual grievances, blaming or helplessness. [Pilch 2003].

More and more often, we can notice the increasing number of marital con-

flicts and divorces (2009 reported a record number of divorces in our country - 71.8 thousands), liberalization of norms and values of individual family members, progressive individualism of family life and disturbances in fulfilling the main functions of family. Broken families, higher risk ones, disintegrated, disorganized, dysfunctional and the families of cumulated pathogenic factors influence destructively on the personal development of the family members who are not able to properly fulfill their functions, particularly those related to the socialization and children upbringing [Kawula 2006].

Also, those families need help and support, and above all, they must be made aware of their dysfunction by showing them other, more educationally desirable examples of behaviors. Particular care should be aimed at children from such families in order to avoid repeating the pathological patterns of behaviors in their future life.

The families of risk should not be underestimated or left alone in the face of problems that they can not handle, and no one can pretend that such families do not exist and just “pass” next to them, next to the still increasing phenomenon, arguing that it does not concern those who are not involved in it. One should support such families with possibly biggest help, especially that of a therapeutic nature in order to stop their “vegetation”. That could help each family member to begin “living” a worthy life, which every person deserves . It takes a lot of work and effort from both the social institutions and the individual persons. However, such work may improve the life conditions for many of those families and to save many individual lives.

Recent years have brought many publications attesting to the fact that the Polish family is in crisis on many levels of its life ranging from changes in structure, functions and positions to devaluation of its preferred norms and values.

The family in crisis according to Kawula [2006], is usually characterized by a particular set of features which are undesirable from the social point of view. Such set does not fulfill family’s assigned functions. This leads to the threats to family’s proper functioning and reduces the possibility of development of its individual members. Families in which there is an accumulation of contradictory relationships between its members or inappropriate relations with the outside world outside are the Problem Families. We are talking about the crisis when the family is unable to cope with the existing situation. Crises pose a great threat to marriage and family life as they are manifested primarily in the lack of mutual understanding between members of the family [Ryś 2000].

Family crises are an inseparable element of the family’s existence. Each family can be affected by them or experience them. The difference is usually between the dynamics and intensity of the crisis. Crises may be temporary and resolvable, then they can take the form of developmental crises which are important in a constructive sense for the family life. On the other hand the crises especially severe and

persistent ones tend to transform into the crises of chronic nature, adversely affecting the functioning of the family. The factors that cause crises are primarily those life events that cause large changes in the family system. Their impact is determined by the degree to which the crisis can threaten the stability of the family. Such families in whom the crises take the permanent form are characterized by a set of attributes pointing the dysfunction or pathology. Those are: material insufficiency, difficult living conditions, social pathology in the family (alcoholism, addiction, crime, violence or mental illness), low socio-emotional and educational awareness of the parents, and single parenting (divorce, separation, staying in prison, a long trip, or a single woman upbringing a child) [ibid.]. Crisis situations in the family can also be generated by chronic conditions which specifically lead to mental and physical overwhelm of the family. The crisis factor can also be attributed to a set of cultural and psychosocial factors manifested for example in disorder of emotional bonds between the family members [Bielan 2004].

In every family there are stressful situations, conflicts, and misunderstandings. In general, seven factors are mentioned which give the reasons of the family conflicts; those factors are related to the family's structure: (1) the risk of time – family members' frequency of mutual interactions and spending too much time together generate a greater likelihood of conflict, (2) the diversity of activities and interests expressed by individual family members which may lead to increased conflict in the family, (3) convergence of competence of family members – “the more specialists, the more conflicts,” (4) a high level of emotional complexity of family, (5) excessive control of individuals resulting from the incorrect understanding of responsibilities and obligations of other family members, (6) the differences in views on life and (7) allocation of roles in the family because of age and sex, rather than one's usefulness and real competence. [Pospiszyl 1998]

Families who are affected by the crisis are called the dysfunctional families. This term mostly refers to disorganized and dysfunctional families. The first one are the families in whom there are visible indicators of abnormal family structure, for example single-parent families. The second one attributes to the disturbed functions of the family [Montessori 1999]. Thus, those are the families that have serious deficiencies in satisfying the basic needs of biological and psychosocial factors, particularly the child's one. [Mościcka 1991]

Basic characteristics of a dysfunctional family can be seen in several areas of its activities. Such a family is usually “closed” which means that it manifests itself in isolation from the outside world and in the absence of close social contacts and friendships. If such contacts occur they are usually very superficial and do not lead to deeper relationships. In the family home there is an atmosphere of deception and lack of sincerity. Nobody tells the truth about the problems plaguing the family which often falsify and distort the real image (“a family myth” created for the so called social needs). In such family everyone is focused on oneself and any reciprocity is missed. Those people live together but in fact separately. Blurred and

tangled or impermeable boundaries exclude the possibility of intimate interpersonal contacts. The basic principle of functioning of those families is: "Do not speak! Do not trust! Do not feel." [Rys 1999]

Dysfunctional family home becomes a source of unpleasantness, an area of tension and frustration for all family members. Dysfunctionality of family, according to S. Kawuli, [2002b], may relate to various extent of the tasks within that family. Those abnormalities may take the following forms:

1. Complete dysfunction, when the family fails completely in the implementation of the tasks of the family and specialized social institutions have to replace it
2. Partial dysfunction, when the family can not properly perform its tasks and some basic functions,
3. Failures of the educational role,
4. Failures in overcoming the marriage crisis
5. Failures in satisfying the needs of the child or in other tasks and areas of family life.

Functional family cares about satisfying all the needs of the children. However, dysfunctional families limit children's development and sometimes even prevent it. The life of a child in such families is generally miserable as a result of failure in satisfying basic needs which leads to a deformation of its development, negative emotional effects, undervalued school achievements and life aspirations [Brażel 1996]. In modern pedagogy we even talk of "childhood in crisis" as a derivative of the crisis in the family, considering it as a sign of impaired socialization in the primary habitat of the young person - the family [Matyjas 2008].

The problem of disturbances in the development of the child growing in a dysfunctional family is a subject of interest for Jim Conway [1997], for whom Erikson's theory of development became the basis to show how the development of essential life skills is prevented by the dysfunctional families.

According to Erikson, the first task of the development is to learn to trust other people. Child acquires the trust basically in dealing with its mother, and then with its father. If between the parents and the child there is a strong bond in conjunction with the affirmation from the adults, the child acquires the belief the he/she can trust such parents and feel safe among them. In the dysfunctional families parents often focus on themselves or are preoccupied with the rivalry between each other. Children from such families enter into later life without the ability to trust others because their parents could not give them the childhood atmosphere of faith and security which results in trust.

The next step is the acquisition of autonomy by the child. In the dysfunctional families the autonomy is not tolerated, the child is not allowed to be a distinct entity who has its own opinion and idea of the world. In the consequence the child becomes a person trying to please everyone, a person for whom the basic, most

necessary need is to stay in any relationship. Those children start their adult lives and often find themselves in toxic relationships. Basically they are never quite sure if what they feel and think is appropriate.

The next tasks that Erikson lists are initiative and hard work when the child experiments and checks its skills and interests. Correctly functioning family supports the child in those actions and allows it to verify oneself. In the dysfunctional families no one accompanies the child in making those attempts, no one supports it when the experiments end in failure. On the contrary, such families only deepen the child's inability to trust oneself and others which results in the fear of any risk.

An important developmental task facing the young man is to form one's own identity, or in other words, discover who he or she really is. The identity of the individual and self-image, as shown by Erikson, are formed when people who we care for give us information about ourselves. We discover what we can do. We discover our talents and abilities. We shape our view of the world and of other people. According to Conway [1997], the dysfunctional family not only prevents the formation of a positive self-image but also suppresses the child's initiative to seek the answer to the question of who it really is.

The next task in Erikson's concept of development is to acquire the ability to form close relationships with other people. Children and teens learn the meaning of love and intimacy especially by watching their parents. Dysfunctional home where conflict continues teaches children to keep away from others and to be afraid of being exposed with their feelings in front of another person. Moreover, children in the dysfunctional families learn that contact with other people means struggle, and that sharing your feelings with someone is a sign of weakness [ibid.].

Not all children can live in the family who properly satisfy their needs. Many children grow up in the dysfunctional homes where they are exposed to difficulties and distortions in achieving the proper development of their personalities, where they are humiliated and where no one respects their rights. Instead of support and care they often receive indifference or hostility from the surrounding. Furthermore, as shown by Conway, those families form in children negative personality traits such as lack of trust in themselves and others, the lack of independence and self-confidence, risk aversion, non-acceptance and underestimation of themselves and lack of ability to love themselves and other people. Later that concludes in primarily negative social functioning in their life.

Every crisis (developmental or destructive) affecting the family brings with it uncertainty as to the future. In the face of such a situation the family uses their regenerative abilities to quickly balance each family members and the system as a whole. Those skills, as well as family resources strengthen its continuity and stability in the face of the emerging crisis, allowing them to oppose the adversities. The

family resources are potentials which the family uses to deal with the crisis. Those resources are individual members, the family as a whole and the community in which it lives. Resources may include material things, but also the mental and spiritual support. Among the personal resources of family members we can distinguish: intelligence, knowledge and skills, as well as personality traits, sense of control over one's own lives and self-esteem. Family resources may also include: family cohesion expressed in the trust, support and integration, adaptability, family organization, communication skills, family strength and its ability to use personal resources to deal constructively with tensions. Community resources include individuals, groups and institutions which can help the family [Kawula 2006]. Those factors help the family in controlling the tension and learning to face the crisis. Each family has its own unique style and strategies to cope with difficult situations. Especially important is the ability to name and identify the problem and to take traditional and unconventional ways of overcoming the crisis. We can enlist four such family-related patterns of coping in difficult situations. Those are: (1) efforts to reduce the number and/or the intensity of requirements, (2) efforts to obtain additional resources that are not currently available for the family, (3) to look for common ways of acting out the tensions (4) to change the meaning of a situation in order to become more accepted by the family, or the acceptance of the fact that the family is doing everything that can be done in any given situation [ibid.].

Not all families are able to cope with their problems by themselves. They often need professional help of an institutional nature. I am thinking of various family assistance centers with psycho-pedagogical support and different types of family therapy. Unfortunately, not all families manage to overcome family crises, especially when one conflict generates the next and the next, thus closing the vicious circle of family fights and disputes. Unresolved or only smoothed out conflicts have particularly negative impact on the family. They are only one step away from family breakdown. If family members lack the will to fight, hope and belief in the ability to change the situation for the better, then I believe that even the best help and treatment will not protect it from decay. The basis for any help is an expressed and realized need and a desire to receive it from others, as well as active involvement in the process in order to solve the resulting crises. The assistance can be effective only when it is not accompanied by pressure and order but by the will to cooperate and change the situation.

A disturbing symptom of the crisis of the modern family, often written about by Polish pedagogues, is its instability and the growing number of divorce cases at courts. Family misunderstandings and conflicts destroy happiness and peace, bringing disorganization in the relationships between the family members and generating indifference and progressive loss of marriage and family bonds. The ability to solve family conflicts must be learned by parents because of each other, but

above all because of their children. If conflicts are rare and dealt with constructively, cohesiveness of the family is not seriously weakened. On the contrary, it reinforces the feeling of strength and bond between the family members. However, when the tensions between family members are permanent and continuous, they may culminate in serious breakdown of family structure and consequently cause its disintegration.

It is difficult not to agree with the Tyszka's opinion [1994], who claims that: "Fortunately we do not have - so far - to deal with the collapse of the family. It is true that millions of families are experiencing a crisis, many of them are falling apart, but the institution of the family still exists, people still get married, however the number of marriages is smaller than in the previous years.. (...) The family is an integral and very important part of any society, including the societies of the European culture that exist in the modern post-industrial civilization, subjected (depending on the country) to the greater or lesser influence "[p.36] .

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