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## The role of a father in raising and socializing a child

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## The role of a father in raising and socializing a child

**Abstract:** The presence of the father is necessary for a normal family life, both for the wife and children. This presence cannot be only passive, physical, it should concern active commitment of the father into the functioning of his family and into the process of upbringing children in particular. A child's mentality is affected not only by the father's absence, but also by pathology of paternity, which means the father who does not perform his functions or performs them in an inappropriate way.

**Key-words:** father, child, family.

### 1. Multi-aspect of the term paternity

The terms father or paternity are difficult to define although everybody has a father, even if he is not aware of that fact. The appellation father defines a man who has a child or children, paternity specifies the fact of being a father [Poznańska 2004].

The term 'paternity' is analyzed in terms of three fundamental aspects: biological, legal and spiritual. Biological aspect, also called physical, relies on family bonds and it is the base of consanguinity. Both a man and a woman give a new life together. The biological fact of being a father influences not only a man, but also a woman and a child [Lacroix 2007]. In the legal meaning a man becomes a father when a child is born in marital or extramarital relationship, or as a result of adoption. In accordance with Polish legal system, a child's father is a man: 1) who is the husband of the mother of the child who was born in the course of marriage duration or before the elapse of 300 days of its termination or annulment; 2) who acknowledged the child voluntarily; 3) who adopted the child; 4) who was acknowledged as the father pursuant to judicial decision. The legal aspect of paternity is connected with the plenitude of power over the child along with the legal care

over him or her. The parents marriage provides the child with 'lawful' descent and locates him or her in the social structure with appropriate social position guaranteed. From this point of view legal paternity is more important than biological paternity [Okoń 2004]. On the other hand, the spiritual aspect of paternity associates a man with his family in a permanent way, without it he would only be a biological father of his child. A man updates or revises his paternity bestowing it with a new dimension thanks to the permanent relationship with a woman who is his life partner and particularly the mother of his children. Relations between a father and a child enrich both sides. A child would not exist, would not develop in a normal way if it was not for the active presence of his or her father, the child, on the other hand, has a considerable impact on the man's life, on the development of his mentality and personality [Mierzwiński 1997].

Apart from these fundamental aspects of understanding the term 'paternity' (biological, legal and spiritual), we may also analyze it taking into consideration social, ideological and psychological aspects. Social paternity means that the father takes care of the child, raises him or her and simultaneously provides for his or her financial needs. The ideological aspect is connected with the world outlook, particularly with religion. It appeals to the metaphor of God Father and to holy fathers, for example saint Joseph. Ideological formulation of paternity is connected with its symbolic aspect where it may be comprehended in various ways, e.g. as political leadership (the father of the nation) or spiritual (the Holy Father). One may also be the father of an idea or scientific discipline [Ceranek-Dadas Neumann-Schmidtke 2004]. On the other hand, psychological paternity entails the mechanisms of a father's impact on children. These are mainly: imitation, identification and modeling. Imitation, also called mimicry, consists in imitating father's behaviours by the child who, in this way, acquires new skills, attitudes and aspirations, learns the basics of speech and motricity, and prepares to perform various social roles. On the other hand, the mechanism of identification begins when the child admires the father and wants to become similar to him, acquire his properties, characteristics and aptitudes. It leads to acquiring the father's attitudes and behaviours as the child's own. Whereas the process of modeling appears when the child tries to understand parents' behaviour and refer its sense to his or her personality. It results in acquiring the models of fundamental social roles (marital, parental, professional, and other) [Pospiszyl 1980]. All three mechanisms of father's affecting the child should take a harmonious course, then they will ensure permanent and appropriate social development of the child and lead him or her to achieve social maturity.

Analyzing various aspects of paternity we should also indicate that paternity may be conscious, planned, longed for and desired, but also unwanted and forced. We may deal with contentious paternity (judicial ascertainment of the paternity) as well as presumed paternity (presumption that the mother's husband is the child's

father) and contradicted paternity (refutation of paternity presumption) or limited paternity (limitation of parental authority by the court). Furthermore, paternity may be of both a positive and negative character. An example of negative paternity is absent paternity (lack of father's commitment into the process of upbringing the child), unemployed paternity (lack of paid work frequently dramatically influences the life of the whole family), unhappy paternity (appears when the child is born ill or disabled), toxic paternity (when the father influences the child in a negative way), or pathological paternity (incestuous among others). Atypical kind of paternity is foster one (in relation to child's biological father), adoptive paternity (originated as a result of adoption), embarrassing paternity (awkward in respect of customs and traditions, morality and law, e.g. extramarital paternity), and single paternity (as a result of separation, divorce or wife's death) [Dąbrowska 2007].

Regardless of what kind of paternity we deal with (obviously positive), its role and meaning need to be emphasized in a child's life, in all its spheres and developmental stages.

## **2. Father's functions in family**

Paternity is a specific role of man and it means: taking an appropriate place in marriage and family, child's (children's) conception, taking solicitous care of these children and their mother, providing for and feeding all family members, and a difficult task of upbringing children [Mierzwiński 1997]. This role of a man consists of specific functions performed in the family: procreation, childcare, livelihood and protection of the family.

Procreation function assumes appropriate forming of a man since his earliest years, through adolescence phase and especially during engagement time. Husband needs to be aware of his responsibility for his child's conception and respect not only his wife's physiology and psyche, mentality, but also moral principles. Properly understood procreation function assumes caring for the wife during the time of pregnancy and labor. Continuation of this function is taking care of the wife and baby after they come home from hospital [Fijałkowi 1996].

Childcare or educational function is not only important and necessary, but it is also practically impossible to replace. The father provides his child with those incentives and patterns or specimen in his social and moral development that the mother is not able to offer at all or to such a wide extent [Witczak 1987]. Each man who became a father should comply with the following rules: 1) love his child; 2) 'verify' his life constantly realizing that personal example is the most important in upbringing; 3) find time for his child: be interested in his or her problems, be able to listen, conduct a reliable dialogue, try to understand, and consequently, but with love, enforce set requirements [Mierzwiński 1997]. A father's problems connected with performing this function result mainly from the lack of time and willingness.

Livelihood and protection of the family – this leading through centuries father's function still keeps its meaning. The father's salary constitutes, in most cases, the basis for family's financial existence. A crucial change in the profile of this father's function is the fact that, in numerous families, father ceased to be its only bread-winner. Men's work, most frequently outside the house, relies on performing a particular job, has a fundamental influence not only on the man's mentality, on his position in the society and his attitude towards the society, but also, above all, on his role in the marriage and family. Work often becomes the condition of setting up a family as it constitutes the source of income for its members. Particular cases are problems connected with father's illness, disability or unemployment as they render performing the function of a bread-winner impossible. The task of protecting the family undergoes transformations as well. It is not only about protecting the wife and children and property from external aggression or some misfortune of fate, but also about protecting the family from being threatened by various destructive influences coming from the contemporary world, on moral, social and political levels [Fijałkowski 1996].

In the twentieth and twenty first centuries paternal functions were submitted to radical transformations under the influence of changes undergoing in the society. Among the causes which led to the evolution in understanding and performing paternal functions we may enumerate: fast development of industry and urbanization, feminist movements, young generation rebellion, influence of psychoanalysis, crisis of marriage and family. The evolution of paternal functions does not have a homogenous character. There are positive transformations, but there are also numerous negative aspects especially those which led to identity dysfunctions and the crisis of the man's authority in the family.

### **3. The significance of a father in a child's development**

The purpose of upbringing is to get children acquainted with social norms and moral values, being a kind of reference to expressing one's own moral judgments or opinions and accepting applicable principles and values. Upbringing influences the development of children and the youth. It teaches readiness and, at the same time, sensitivity to act morally, to solve and recognize a particular situation appropriately [Rise 2006].

Identification with the father has an impact on the child's proper development. Only through it can the child achieve subsequent higher stage of moral and social development. Children whose father becomes involved in their upbringing through playing and talking together are more cognitively and socially competent, are endowed with more empathy and manifest better mental adaptation. Additionally, if a child has his or her father's support in every situation, he or she knows that they may always count on him, they feel completely safe and open in relation to both parents. Fathers have a huge contribution to their children so-

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cialization, they positively influence their early development of emotionality and expression. The specimen of both mother and father are necessary for the child to enable him or her to learn the characteristic role for a particular gender. A child's identification with the father has an impact on appropriate development of moral principles and the feeling of guilt while violating them. To make the process of identification proper, it should be characterized by a deep emotional bond with the child [Kawula 2007].

The bond that is created between a father and child decides about the emotional stability of children. Sons who will witness how their father respects mother, how he bestows his care and respect on all family members, will have a good pattern for their future families. On the other hand, a girl who has good relations with her father and observes his behaviours, will have a pattern to shape her relations with the opposite sex. If the upbringing process is well directed, if a child is well mobilized to perform functions and tasks placed in front of him or her, then, in the future, he or she will definitely be capable of dealing with the troubles of life. Additionally, the child will be able to cope with defeat which may, but does not have to, happen to them [Świdorska 2011].

The most beneficial form of proper social and moral upbringing turns out to be a lenient childcare attitude of a father towards his child. Children's moral feelings are, regardless of the gender, particularly universally developed when the father counts with the child's opinion on his childcare and educational endeavors. Applying strength and corporal punishments by fathers as educational methods both with boys and girls results in only superficial acquiring moral principles, what manifests itself in the lack of any feeling of guilt while violating them and also in the lack of willingness to understand another person. The more rejecting and punishing fathers are, the more aggressive children become. The degree of aggression is dependent on fathers' methods of childcare impact. Mother's childcare lenience is not enough for her son not to be aggressive. The lack of a father or his inappropriate performance of the parental role may induce very deep and irreversible dysfunctions in children's development. Children, and boys in particular, raised without fathers, manifest the feeling of guilt after violating various principles to a much lesser degree and are less inclined to accept admonitions. The lack of a father causes children to suffer mental loss of balance and abusing parental authority by fathers is frequently reduced to tyranny in families. That is why, balancing and finding a middle ground as for the role of a father is fundamental [Janicka 2010]. The father has an enormous influence on shaping his child's actions in almost all spheres of his or her activeness. Satisfactory relations with the father are favourable for the child's general development, serve to shape an open attitude towards people and release activeness and the joy of life.

Through mutual impact of a father-child relation a mature paternity is born. The father, through accompanying his child in his development, stands before the

possibility of his own personal growth. The child helps his or her father not only to become a better daddy, but also to become a more responsible person. The father who raises his child may at the same time be raised by his child. Paternity is a fundamental experience for a man. Thanks to it, he may achieve complete maturity of his human life in both emotional and spiritual sense [Augustyn 2009].

The father's participation in the childcare and educational process is a factor introducing the element of order and regularity, consistency and perseverance into home atmosphere. These are extremely important characteristics as for implementing children to comply with moral principles, and also in the process of upbringing and socialization. The father's image in the eyes of his child affects children's mentality and their ways of perceiving the world overwhelmingly.

#### **4. The crisis of father's authority**

It is easy to become a father, however, it is much more difficult to be a role model and authority for the children. Lectures and moralizing or sententiousness on behaviour are of no significance for children. What counts for them is, in the first place, their father's personal example. The way he behaves in everyday situations is as important as the accordance of what he says and does.

In the light of sources connected with materials relating to memoirs, the father used to be the most important member of his family, he decided about the fate of his wife and children, about the finances and education of his offspring, as the family's bread-winner was surrounded by family members in the atmosphere of admiration. In his relations with children stuffiness or rigidity and the lack of emotional care was observed. He was frequently absent and his numerous financial, connected with assets and other journeys caused distance between him and his family [Kabacińska, Ratajczak 2010].

Radical socio-economic and cultural and custom transformations which shocked humanity of the twentieth century had a particularly widespread impact on a family, people creating it and especially the father. Existing through centuries model of a father figure as a patriarch of a huge family, including a number of generations, that had indisputable, sometimes even despotic authority, underwent, in most industrialized societies, radical transformations. Most frequently it disappeared, got replaced by a completely new model with characteristics difficult to define. The problem, which has its repercussions in a family and society, is that the former model of paternity was eliminated while the new one has not been developed yet. And there is no unanimity as for what it should consist in [Kawula 2006].

Civilization processes and transformations brought about the crisis of paternity. Men's attitudes towards women changed as did the way of performing by men the role of fathers. The main reason for the crisis of paternity is industrialization and urbanization. Another is the emancipation of women. The nineteen sixties,

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when women started to educate and develop professionally, created a kind of a rival for men. They are no longer the only bread-winners in their families and that weakened their previous position. Furthermore, women became more self-reliant and liberated by professional work. On the other hand, intensive expectations and consumption needs forced additional paid work from contemporary fathers and mothers. Their work, however, progresses in the conditions of high unemployment prevailing in the country, what causes the feeling of constant threat [Lechowska 2012].

Another attribute supporting the statement that paternity is in a crisis is the men's pursuit for a career and a well-paid job. What, on the other hand, results in losing by a potential dad touch with children because of his frequent absence at home. A husband and father absorbed in professional matters, identifies himself with his job more than with his family. What is more, the lack of professional success causes depression and breakdown. Another reason for paternity crisis is legislation. It discriminates fathers in court trials for recognizing the right to custody over their child after the breakdown of marriage. There is a general stereotype connected with it that only a woman is prepared to be a custodian and guardian due to the nature which shaped her for it. That is why, women have better chances to acquire legal custody over the child than men. An indication of paternal crisis is alcoholism and drug addiction as well [Augustyn 2009].

The father's authority in the family is crucial and it is connected with responsibility for the whole family. Some people tend to replace the lack of authority with despotism and strength. Men also lose their paternal authority because of unemployment. Mean-while contemporary paternity is something more than just financial providing for the family. The father is to be responsible for current fates and directions for development of his family [Pulikowski 2010].

The presence of the man, husband and father is necessary for a normal family life, both for the wife and children. This presence cannot be only passive, physical, it should concern active commitment of the father into the functioning of his family and into the process of upbringing children in particular. A child's mentality is affected not only by the father's absence, but also by pathology of paternity, which means the father who does not perform his functions or performs them in an inappropriate way.

## 5. Conclusion

Prevailing characteristic of a contemporary father is his permanent absence at home. Modern, professionally working fathers lost traditional attitudes connected with moral authority and passing on values. In families they currently only represent themselves and not from the most powerful point. In their parental attitudes they lost some former severity, firmness and consistency – traditional attributes of paternity. In such a complicated situation, still being a value, contemporary



paternity gets more and more difficult to perform, it has to transform and adapt. It seems to oscillate towards the attitude of openly expressing love and serving the family in various ways instead of previous dictatorship. That is why, nowadays paternal authority seems to be labile and it should not be like that. Contemporary paternal authority should coexist in a partner dialogue with maternal authority. Therefore, women should, in the first place, help their men to re-shape their paternal attitudes and new functions in families.

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