

Krzysztof Zajdel

Father's Role in Children's Upbringing

Pedagogika Rodziny 5/1, 77-87

2015

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.



DE GRUYTER
OPEN

Pedagogika Rodziny. Family Pedagogy
nr 5(1)/2015, ss. 77–87
DOI: 10.1515/fampe-2015-0007

Krzysztof Zajdel

Uniwersytet Zielonogórski

Father's Role in Children's Upbringing

Abstract: This article tackles the issue of the importance of a father for his family, particularly own children. It provides a small historical description of changes that occurred within families from the prehistoric times until the postindustrial era, whereas the second part of the article provides an attempt to examine and compare children's and parents' opinions on the role of the father in a contemporary family, stressing his importance. The sample research was carried out amongst pupils of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd primary school grade. The conclusions that have been drawn might come across as surprising, nonetheless, it is worth to refer to more expanded research to seek the answer to the question on father's role from the period of childhood to the phase of becoming independent.

Key words: father, the importance of the father in child's development, family, caring father.

Family provides a number of functions for its members, what can be reflected in the quality of upbringing, for example within full family, where children enjoy support both from their mother's, as well as father's side. Nowadays, the large scale of divorces seems to be disfavoured full families, which constituted the most common model in the past. It is generally recognized that upon divorces and separation the mother is actually the one who bears responsibility for child's upbringing, whereas the father, willing to maintain contact with own offspring, finds such maintenance troublesome, hence so many associations gathering men, whose contacts with children is hindered. Notwithstanding, father's presence for the growth of their sons and daughters is undoubtedly important. The most significant factors within family environments, ensuring appropriate development

and upbringing include:

- parental, upbringing awareness;
- atmosphere at home, characterized by sense of bond, ability to coexists and cooperate, mutual respect and understanding;
- ability to organize the upbringing process in the family;
- ability to combine family upbringing with other forms of educational influences, particularly pre-school institutions [Cudak 1999, pp. 214–215].

Father's importance

Cultural research on fatherhood provide many illustrations of how patterns of the father have been differently shaped by social and economic powers, differing from one society to another.

In Neolithic times the men tasks were to hunt, make amours, protect and care for own small family, as well as to participate in the family elder's meetings. Women dealt with cooking, making kitchenware, feeding babies, providing food such as fruit, nuts, roots and small animals they were able to hunt. At the end of this period men were the rulers of the family, however the attitude of both parents to their children was cordial and affectionate. The upbringing was managed by imitation and instructions. The son would come only into the objects and tools after the father, whereas the daughter would inherit the mother's possessions.

Within higher hunter-gatherer cultures, family still constituted the reproduction group, subject to the clan's authority, with men representing not the family, but the clan itself. The woman's social position decreased both within the clan as well as the family. This period marked improved hunting but predominantly the invention of offensive weapon to fight within close distance.

The man became the main bread-winner, as woman's work was not as efficient and effective as his. The man had to express courage, fastness and aggressiveness, what in turn gave him mental and psychological superiority over woman. He began to distance himself from her, showing his authority. Male offspring was highly expected, hence newly born daughters were often despised by own fathers.

In pastoral culture human learned to tame and breed animals. It was a male culture as it was mainly generated by them. Woman's position was profoundly depreciated, and due to impurities she was moved away from household works as it was believed she would pose a threat to the farming animals and cultivation. After the death of the father, the authority was taken over by the eldest son. The attitude of children and grandchildren to the patriarch was full of submissiveness and reverence. Women's position depended on the number of delivered children. Moreover, it was a time of austere customs, as a girl that lost her virginity prematurely and had a child out of wedlock, could have been killed [Filipiak 2002].

During the early agriculture the men still managed hunting, but also burned

forests and jungles, preparing the land for the cultivation. The women would saw, harvest, cultivate, farm small animals and deal with pottery. Children inherited mother's social class, so the status of the daughters began its slow rise. The man did not become the member of the wife's clan or even own, small family, as he was rather a children's friend, not serving a father's function explicitly. Hence, he had no power over them as the wife was the one who dealt with the upbringing.

Medieval European families were of patriarchal structure. The dominant position of the father was expressed in his authority over all family members. He was the one making decisions, managing the property, controlling both wife and the offspring. He expected not only to be obeyed, but also "served".

The families of early Middle Ages were characterized by a strong male position, as the wife was considered the husband's property, often committing suicide after his death. Young descendants of wealthy families were introduced into the art of knight crafts from their childhood, thus they participated in war crusades and hunting. It was also the period that launched the function of the care-giver that was looking after the sons of the wealthy [Komorowska 1972, pp. 25–27].

Between 12th and 14th centuries, family constituted a basic economic and social unit, with husband the bread-winner, managing the household, farming and the property.

At that time marriages were not long-lasting due to striking death rate of mothers upon delivery. In such situations husbands were often subsequently taking younger women as new wives. At the time of Late Middle Ages, the family in Polish Kingdom consisted of the parents, children and further relatives that lived altogether. The material equality and husband's supervisory power were the main criteria of selecting the spouse. Still, it was the husband who made all the important decisions and managed own and wife's properties [Komorowska 1972, pp. 30–36].

The peasantry family life looked different at that time, as the upbringing role of the parents was conditioned by the closest social surrounding, i.e. the congregation and the extended family. The small family's major task was to provide children, with parents as the only child care-givers, accomplishing the tasks to prepare their own children to become parents when they grow up.

Nonetheless, some cases where the extended family could take the child away from own parents were reported, if the latter did not carry out their parental duties appropriately [Znaniecki 2011, pp. 111–115].

Bourgeois family stressed husband's dominant role, as he managed the workshop and made all the crucial decisions concerning own family. The offspring provided the workforce for the workshop, similar as in case of shops that a father owned. In fact, the father served as a supervisor of the shop or a workshop, providing employment for the family, being the bread-winner and its authority

at the same time. Significant attention was drawn in the big cities to the process of upbringing. The girls learned how to perform household duties, having such values instilled as resourcefulness, economy, affection, devotion and the ability to become inferior to a man. On the other hand, the sons were taught to perform professional tasks, as from the childhood they observed their fathers working in the workshops, and then, as the senior journeyman, they acquired the necessary skills in other similar places of apprenticeship [Komorowska, pp. 38–40].

Modern times did not generate crucial changes for the bourgeois families, as father's role was still predominant, with wife having her rights granted and sons undertaking vocational training, often leaving family home to accomplish their guild apprenticeship. The only noticeable change was reflected in the decrease of women's independency, that – as a widow – found it harder and harder to run a workshop, hence such women would often enter another marriage.

Late modern times meant for women losing their independency and autonomy. It became difficult for them to manage the property and they had to be represented by the man. It resulted, among others, from the growth of the Reformation, as women began to be identified with the evil, with simultaneously rising position and status of the man-husband. Besides, Poland launched at that time a regular army, hence the hired soldiers lost their source of income and had to return to their family homes.

Previously, before husband's return, it would be the wife who ran the households, however upon his arrival, she had to give in to her husband. In bourgeois families father held the power over his wife and children, a power that could be so strong that generated hatred. It was accompanied by visible decrease in women's legal position, as she was moved away from professional matters, unable to participate in guild workshops however, still taking active part in social life. The most significant changes occurred within gentry families and father's patriarchal position, deciding on his daughter's marriages, demanding obedience from own sons at the same time. Nonetheless, children were brought up by the mother, who was also responsible for their education.

The sons then were subsequently taken care of by their fathers that taught them the appropriate code of conduct, whereas in the Jesuit colleges they learned how to speak and write Latin. The youth did not return to fathers' homes in order to free own self from their power, hence whether remained in the court or – if they were rich enough – travelled to Italy or France to study. Still, the father's formal authority lasted until his death.

In the 18th century the lower middle-class and peasantry families remained patriarchal, with the father as the supervisor of the property and households, the decision-maker on matters related to the farming as well as personal issues of the family members. The families of the rich gentry, although still patriarchal,

became subject to loosened family bonds, followed by diminished father's authority. It partly resulted from the fact that the sons could develop their skills in the courts or while making a career in the army. They encountered new points of views, different from their fathers', often more attractive and inspiring. Hence, the father's position deteriorated as soon as the sons could gain their own source of income, becoming independent from their father's property [Znaniński 2011, pp. 45–48].

City craft's family was not subject to significant changes as the workshops were still run by the fathers, and he was the one who managed the production, deciding on his wife's and children's matters. Families remained the smallest social community and productive unit where everyone found its place, fulfilling similar roles within social and professional life.

Second half of the 18th century marked the emergence of free professions, including lawyers, doctors and clerks that possessed no property, what consequently loosened their family bonds. The father ceased to be considered as the principal and became the bread-winner, hence his role significantly decreased with concurrently increased mother's position and weakened bonds with further, extended family.

The large noble families were subject to changes within the morals and customs concerning the durability of the marriage. At that time Poland was one of the countries with biggest number of divorces all over Europe. It resulted in decrease of its importance and deterioration of the family bonds, particularly between the parents and their children that were brought up by appropriate caregivers.

Patriarchate was still the mainstay of the 19th century rural family, specified by permanence, coherence, inseparability of marriage and significant father's authority as the head of the family, identified with power and force. Relations with parents, particularly with the fathers, were formal, with little emotions expressed whatsoever. As far as everyday work was concerned, children were treated by own fathers as service. Parents were deciding on their offspring's marriage plans and even their parental issues. Property was at the forefront of the family life and efforts.

Summing up the image of the family proceeding the period of industrialization it was mainly of patriarchal, institutional nature, with productive aspirations and prerogatives. Its classical version implied the family members had to work within the family circle under the father's supervision, who was the owner of such institutions and enjoyed full rights towards the fruit of such work. Everyday life was split between the family and the work activities. Father held the superior power over the family members and as a husband he additionally provided internal coherence of such small community. Nonetheless, such model lacked individualization of its members with material and matter-of-factness relations

outweighing the emotional and personal bonds.

Such model of family implied its significant size (multigenerational mode), as all the members lived within one household, including some extended family members such as unmarried brothers and unmarried sisters and some further relatives.

Pre-industrial family was the open one, as its institutional nature entailed preservation of customs concerning social roles of the father, the mother, the wife, the husband, the brother, the sister, the grandfather, and etc. Moreover, family needs were superior to desires and needs of the individuals.

Contemporary family

Sociologists provide with models of different types of families, such as:

1. Two-generational family, consisting only of parents and children, referred to as small, full, nuclear or basic family;
2. Three-generational family, referred to as large, where more than two generations live together “under the same roof”, and run a common household together;
3. Extended or dispersed family, when a given marriage and the families of the closer and more distant relatives live separately and run separate households, but often create a coherent family circle [Adamski 1984, pp. 18–20].

The literature on the subject provides different structures of family types depending on several criteria, including number of the family members, organizational forms of the family life, forms of family maintenance, hierarchy of prestige and authority, living environment or the family lifestyle.

Thus, contemporary families function within various forms according to its structure. On the basis of the members completion, the following family types may be taken into account:

- a full family: natural, reconstructed (with one new parent, e.g. after divorce or death of the spouse), adoptive, foster (within legal child’s custody granted by the family court), contractual (always ready to accept a child on a temporary basis);
- an incomplete family: orphan (lack of parents due to their death when the care-giving is provided by relatives), half-orphan (death of one of the spouses), dissolved (divorce, separation, abandoning, migration of one of the parents aboard), single, unmarried mothers [Olearczyk 2000].

A full family comprises of parents and children, and amongst the general number of families it is the predominant type. According to the researchers a full structure implies a natural family where children have their natural parents. For instance, Olearczyk claims that a full family is the one where the man and the woman are bound with marriage (whether sacramental or civic), joint by a

strong emotional bond, living together and bringing up their offspring together. Incomplete family, on the other hand, is the one with only one of the parents and children, namely single mother or single father and the child/children. Other scholars perceive an incomplete family as the one that include one parent looking after own or co-spouse child/children, living together with them.

Nowadays divorces have become an inseparable part of the social reality, often referred to as one of the main causes of the emergence of incomplete families. It is truly an omnipresent phenomenon, hence the society becomes more and more understanding and tolerant towards such form of solving marriage problems. The act of a divorce is considered as something, that under given circumstances, can happen to every family. In the past, however, such way of thinking was unacceptable.

Disapproval, on the other hand, concentrates on hypothetical repercussions such rising number of divorces entails for the family existence. It also concerns the causes of appearance of liberal attitudes towards previously expected durability of the marriage and factual reasons for its dissolution. The reasons for the breakup of a marriage unchangeably include unfaithfulness, alcohol abuse, characters incompatibility, abusive attitude to other family members and financial arguments. Separation – a state where there is no more coexistence between spouses due to aware avoidance of one (or both) of them to fulfill this duty [Piasecki 2011, p. 78].

Death of one of the parent, similarly as divorce or separation, brings about significant transformation of its structure. Each family member acquires a new meaning for the rest of its members. One of the parents becomes a “widow” or “widower”, hence a child shares own feelings and experiences with one of the parents only. Responsibility for providing care and bringing up a child or children is held by one of the spouses, although previously it would be a shared activity.

Last of the causes of emergence of incomplete families is a temporary absence of one of the parents. Nowadays, there are many professions which performance requires from the parent a longer separation from the family home, to recall sailors, geologists, fishermen, etc. Moreover, since the era of industrialization the demand for qualified construction workers, engineers, doctors and scientist is also significant. Such specialists can be delegated by various institutions to given, distant places in the home country or aboard in order to perform some work or gain new experience. Besides, private immigration abroad seeking employment is one of the most common causes for the emergence of incomplete families. Last but not least, it can also result from serving deprivation of liberty in penal institution by one of the parents.

Another pattern of family life is defined as cohabitation. It is often commonly said that such persons “shack up together”, or that it is a marriage without the “piece of paper”. The literature recalls in this regard the notions of a free relationship,

a trial marriage or a “wild” marriage. Each term takes into account different aspect of cohabitation, hence it can be a short-term relationship, or the opposite, a relation between two people that is of long-lasting character. As far as the latter version is concerned, it can imply a strong, durable relation of two people that also bring up a child. It is commonly recognized that a free relationship is a form of prolonged period of engagement or a domain of social margin, concerning the elderly as well as young generation [Szłęzak 1992, p. 11]. According to Ćwiek, a lawyer and a writer, persons decide on such pattern of relation due to finical benefits, resulting from the fiscal regulations, social privileges and avoidance of marriage obligation [Ćwiek 2002, pp. 2–5].

Traditional family can be also referred to as biological, as sexual function used to be identified with procreative one. The consequence of the frequency of spouses’ sexual intercourses was reflected in subsequent pregnancy of the woman. Woman’s life was therefore determined by continued deliveries of babies and their further nurturing, as long as she was fertile. Nonetheless, insignificant advancement of medicine, poor hygienic conditions as well as low material and living standards often threatened the duration of such family life [Tyszką 1992, pp. 68–72].

Subsequently, families became subject to industrialization and urbanization, consequently undergoing another transformation, ceasing the reference and relations to its previous structure.

Thus, we may pose a question how such full family functions. This is the question I asked not only to the parents, but also to children from the first three grades of the primary school. The research was carried out by my students in few primary schools upon their students apprenticeship in May 2014, when 50 children and parents were interviewed.

The conclusions from the sample research can be formulated as follows.

The first issue in the focus of research attention was how often fathers help their children with homework.

Table 1. Frequency of helping with homework

	Child’s opinion	Parents’ opinions
Only mum helps	95	60
Only dad helps	5	15
Both parents help	0	25

Source: own study.

According to this data, from the children’s perspective, fathers do not pay too much attention to this activity hence mothers are the ones who spend more time on this activity with the child. Although parents’ declarations correspond to children’s opinion, parents imagine their engagement is bigger than the

children's opinions show. It implies that fathers do not spend time with their children doing homework, so an opportunity to shape a close bond is taken for granted. Moreover, children are not provided with an alternative options to learn something and get the support they need.

Parents, when asked why fathers help so little with homework, often recalled the opinion that fathers are busy with own professional activities, are not patient enough, or will help when the child shall grow up and the tasks will be "more serious". They seem to neglect the fact that support at this developmental stage is of key importance and it is crucial for the child to be assisted from their begging of its growth.

Another aspect concerned preparing meals, but not a precisely meal that a family has within the day, but rather an occurrence, even an episode, when a father helps in preparation of breakfast or lunch.

Table 2. Fathers' helping with preparing meals

	Child's opinion	Parents' opinions
Only mum	90	25
Only dad	0	5
Both parents	10	70

Source: own study.

Differences in the expressed opinions are also visible in this aspect, since parents want to believe they prepare meals together, whereas children perceive only their mothers within this activity. Fathers were saying that they provide the products, buy potatoes, hand out the bread loaf to their wives or bring butter to the table, hence from their perspective they helped. On the other hand, when the mothers were further investigated about this topic, they often stressed they are left to fulfill this tasks alone, as their husbands have "other things to do", cannot cook or usually prepare the meal in the wrong way. When asked what the latter means, they said that, for instance, scrambled eggs could be served 5 days in a row, or a fried sausage was served for lunch with no vegetables, and bread only. Hence, it can be assumed that fathers do not fulfill this task properly, so it becomes the women's responsibility, as perceived by the children, and partly by their mothers.

Fulfilling tasks within a family also concerns taking care when a child gets sick. Hence, the next question is who goes to see the doctor or remembers about the medications when it is needed.

Table 3. Taking care of a child during sickness

	Child's opinion	Parents' opinions
Only mum	50	65
Only dad	15	5
Grandparents	35	30

Source: own study.

When a child is sick, mothers are at the forefront, still, grandparents' support is also important, as according to the opinions of children and parents it happens reasonably often (over 30% of indications). Unfortunately, in this regard fathers remain on the margin of such activities. One of the fathers said he is not able to deal with own child's cry or the sight of blood. It seems that wives do not get enough support from their husbands when taking care of a sick child, as it results from the discourse of the interviews. Nonetheless, it must be remembered it is a key element consolidating and bringing a family together.

The last issue tackled a „typically” male specialty, namely, coming to school to meet the headmasters when a child is being treated unfairly or when parents are notified to come for a meeting regarding own child's conduct.

Table 4. Intervention at school when a child is being unfairly treated

	Child's opinion	Parents' opinions
Dad always does it	40	60
Mum always does it	40	30
They do it in turns	20	10

Source: own study.

As it can be concluded from the above aspect, it is something fathers compensate for, although there is still a discrepancy between children's and parents' opinions. When this issue was further investigated it turned out the parents think fathers are somewhat forced to such visits, as women appeal to their male features so they can deal with this problem “properly”. If such conversation did not take place, similarly as in the case of other issues related to taking care of a child, those would be probably women who would have to deal with it.

Summary

Summing up the theoretical reflections and the sample research it can be stated that the participation of the father in critical situations is noticeable, nonetheless, it is the mother who supports the child and provides care for it most frequently. Thus, mother is the one who goes to the doctors with own child, she is the one who gets a wound dressed when a child falls over or hurts itself, she prepares the meals, helps in homework. The father is present, but only physically. Although the research sample concerned children aged 7 to 10, the proportion could change over the course of time. Upon the research the fathers claimed that they will definitely have better contact with their children when they slightly grow up, so they could have a full-scale conversation, when such child does not cry that much, and they will be able to play football together or do the thing men usually

do. Whether it shall happen or not it is rather difficult to verify, although there are definitely fathers who manifest great engagement in such relations, spending a lot of time with their children. Perhaps, in order to answer the question on the actual role of the father in children's upbringing, the youth population up to the 18 years of age should be researched, so such role of the father could be better understood.

Bibliography

- Adamski F. (1984), *Socjologia małżeństwa i rodziny: wprowadzenie*, PWN, Warszawa.
- Ćwiek W. (2002), *Konkubinat*, Wydawnictwo C. H. Beck, Warszawa.
- Cudak H. (1992), *Znaczenie rodziny w rozwoju i wychowaniu małego dziecka*, PTHP, Warszawa.
- Filipiak M. (2002), *Socjologia kultury, zarys zagadnień*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu MCS, Lublin.
- Komorowska J. (1972) (ed.), *Przemiany rodziny polskiej*, Instytut Wydawniczy CRZZ, Warszawa.
- Olearczyk E.T. (2000), *Rodzina i szkoła*, „Wychowawca”, nr 3.
- Piasecki K. (ed.) (2011), *Komentarz kodeksu rodzinnego i opiekuńczego*, LexisNexis, Warszawa.
- Szłęzak A. (1992), *Stosunki majątkowe między konkubentami: zagadnienia ogólne*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza, Poznań.
- Tyszka Z. (1997) (ed.), *Podstawowe pojęcia i zagadnienia socjologii rodziny*, Wydawnictwo Akademii Rolniczej im. Augusta Cieszkowskiego, Poznań.
- Znanięcki F. (2001), *Socjologia wychowania*, PWN, Warszawa.