Childhood and Parenthood from the Socio-Cultural Perspective: Transformations of Family Function from the Polish People's Republic to the Present

Dzieciństwo i rodzicielstwo w perspektywie społeczno-kulturowej. Przemiany funkcji rodziny od PRL-u do współczesności

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Abstract: The academic aim of the article is to examine the concepts of childhood and the family and its functions in two distinct historical periods within the socio-cultural context. This article presents a literature review alongside the author's own conclusions and reflections. It discusses theoretical perspectives, reports, and research findings relevant to the subject. The primary methodology used was desk research, analysing secondary data, and reviewing subject literature. The study characterizes the socio-cultural background of both periods: Poland under the People's Republic (PRL) up to and following the systemic transformation, highlighting the evolving roles of the family and the perceptions of childhood. The analysis includes the functioning of the family across different time frames while engaging in socio-cultural discourse surrounding childhood, family, and parenting from various perspectives. The practical significance of this topic lies in understanding the socio-cultural influences, the role of the state, its governance, and ideologies on the family, as well as the progressive changes in its functions. It also provides insight into informed educational interventions and the creation of an appropriate family model. Lack of awareness and susceptibility to ideologies and liberal trends lead to the deconstruction and dysfunction of the family unit.

Keywords: child, family and parenthood, functions of the family, childhood, Polish People's Republic, modernity

Abstrakt: Celem naukowym prezentowanego artykułu jest ukazanie dziecka i dzieciństwa oraz rodziny i jej funkcji w dwóch różnych epokach w kontekście uwarunkowań społeczno-kulturowych. W artykule dokonano przeglądu literatury przedmiotu z jednoczesną prezentacją własnych konkluzji i refleksji. Przedstawiono stanowiska teoretyczne, raporty i wnioski z badań dotyczących podjętego tematu. Metodę główną stanowiła zatem analiza danych zastanych desk research oraz analiza literatury przedmiotu. Scharakteryzowano tło społeczno-kulturowe obu okresów: Polski powojennej jako PRL-u do czasu transformacji ustrojowej i po niej, z jednoczesnym ukazaniem postępujących zmian w funkcjach rodziny oraz percepcji dziecka i dzieciństwa. Analiza objęła zagadnienia związane z funkcjonowaniem rodziny w różnych przestrzeniach czasowych z jednoczesnym podjęciem dyskursu socjokulturowego obejmującego dziecko i dzieciństwo, rodzinę i rodzicielstwo w różnych perspektywach. Aplikacyjne znaczenie podjętego tematu ma służyć zrozumieniu wpływów społeczno-kulturowych, znaczenia państwa, jego ustroju, ideologii na rodzinę oraz postępujące zmiany w jej funkcjach. Pozwala także na świadome oddziaływania wychowawcze i kreowanie odpowiedniego modelu rodziny. Brak świadomości, uleganie ideologiom, liberalnym trendom prowadzi do jej dekonstrukcji i dysfunkcyjności.

Słowa kluczowe: dziecko, rodzina i rodzicielstwo, funkcje rodziny, dzieciństwo, PRL, współczesność

INTRODUCTION

Childhood and parenting, along with the child and parent figures, are two inseparable categories in pedagogy, frequently explored in research and scholarly reflection. The study attempts to trace the evolution of family roles from the era of the Polish People's Republic (PRL) to the present, simultaneously portraying the child as an active subject of caregiving and educational influences. The aim of this discourse is to present this evolution from a socio-cultural perspective, encompassing essentially two consecutive yet distinct periods marked by social, political, and cultural transformations. Each era is characterized by its own paradigms and discourses surrounding the child and childhood, as well as parenting and its roles. Children and parents, along with their roles in caregiving and socialization, remain a consistent focus of scholarly exploration.

The aim of the article is to show childhood and parenting, including changes in family functions. The background is the socio-cultural conditions in the changing epochs in Poland, from the People's Republic of Poland to the present. The extensive time covered by the analysis and the changes taking place limit the characteristics of the described changes. The research problem is an attempt to answer the question: What socio-cultural tendencies and conditions accompanied the changes in the categories of childhood and parenthood? In what direction has the evolution of the function of the family from the Polish People's Republic to the present day?

The criterion for the selection of literature for the presented analyses became the epochs in question and their characteristics. Due to the pedagogical nature of the presented text, most of the literature is classified as pedagogy. It is complemented by publications in the field of sociology, although the dominant emphasis is the achievements of pedagogy, including social pedagogy.

1. Child and Parents – Functions of the Family and its Role in Development

The child and childhood are inseparably linked to the family, along with parental roles and attitudes. The quality of childhood, and thus a child's developmental capacity, is a function of the family's condition and the fulfilment of its roles. These roles are shaped by socio-cultural contexts, customs, traditions, historical periods, and ongoing cultural transformations. Paradoxically, childhood may also be viewed as an unchanging category, endowed with intrinsic characteristics and attributes. However, the portrayal and experience of childhood are shaped by epochs, fashions, trends, and even ideologies, as well as their corresponding systems and political structures. Childhood defines future stages of human development and life (Nowak 2001, 161), forming a psychological and cultural construct that contributes to identity-building across the successive stages of life (Erikson 2004). As B. Matyjas (2008, 37) notes, "all studies and analyses of childhood must address the child's living environment within the family, school, peer groups, and mass media". The author further asserts

that "the primary environment for living, development, and upbringing, which shapes childhood, is the family" (Matyjas 2008, 37). This undeniable statement finds its rightful place in social research and is particularly relevant today, in an era when childhood and family face crisis. This highlights the family's pivotal role in socialization and educational processes. The essential influence of the family on an individual's future is well-documented in numerous academic publications. However, an antithesis to the family's critical role can be found in studies on family dysfunction and its impact on child development. According to S. Cudak (2013, 41), "awareness of functioning in a dysfunctional environment, threatened by conflicts, aggression, and violence, also negatively impacts intellectual development. Children's educational needs and attitudes towards cognitive, educational, and caregiving content at school are disrupted".

Another conclusion drawn by the cited author is that "children from dysfunctional families achieve lower educational outcomes. They exhibit low motivation or lack of motivation for school learning. They are passive, often apathetic, and reluctant to engage in educational activities" (ibidem). Other authors have also highlighted the characteristics of dysfunctional and pathological families and their developmental consequences for children (Becker-Pestka, Dubis and Różyńska 2018; Prusak and Sala 2011; Łuczyński 2008; Graczyk 2018). It is therefore challenging to separate a child's development from their upbringing environment, within which the family stands as the most crucial element.

2. Family and its Functions – Selected Theoretical Viewpoints in Pedagogy and other disciplines

The family, as the primary social group, undeniably serves as the first educational environment for a child. As A. Kamiński stated, "it is the fundamental community of life, primarily emotional, where mutual alignment of views and judgments occurs throughout life, where people connect with their whole personality, and the home serves as emotional support, a bastion of psychological security" (Kamiński 1972, 82). J. Rembowski (1972, 83) describes the family as "a small yet primary group with a unique organization and specific role distribution among its members, united by mutual moral responsibility, conscious of its distinctiveness, bound by traditions and habits, united in love, and accepting one another". Similarly, Z. Tyszka (1993, 695). notes that "the family constitutes an integral part of every society; it represents its smallest and fundamental unit. It is the most important social group, a basic group with which an individual is closely tied through significant parts of their personality and essential social roles (such as husband, wife, father, mother, family provider). It also serves as a reference group, with which an individual consciously and strongly identifies as a member, co-creating and adopting its cultivated views, attitudes, customs, and behaviour patterns".

As a social structure and a system with defined tasks, the family fulfils certain functions that affirm its social value and legitimize its roles. These functions

serve as indicators of its "correctness" in a functional sense or, conversely, its dysfunction. The alignment of these functions with social expectations and values also dictates societal judgment. "Dysfunctional families are those unable to fulfil their functions adequately. Family dysfunction may encompass various aspects of task performance," (Kawula, Brągiel and Janke 2007, 132). According to S. Kawula, this dysfunction may involve "failures in performing educational tasks", difficulties in meeting a child's needs, or challenges within different areas of family life.

A typical classification of family functions was introduced by M. Ziemska, who identified functions related to procreation, caregiving, mental hygiene, upbringing, and broader social functions (socialization and productive functions aimed at enhancing individual creative and productive forces that constitute social value) (Ziemska 1975, 36). More detailed family functions and typologies are provided by Z. Tyszka (1976, 61-69) and F. Adamski (1984, 46-47). Z. Tyszka's typology is particularly comprehensive, underscoring the unique character of family functions. In addition to those mentioned by M. Ziemska, Tyszka includes material-economic, legal-control, cultural, and recreational-social functions (Tyszka 1976). He defines functions as "specialized and ongoing actions of family members, arising from tasks they may or may not fully recognize, carried out within norms and patterns" (Tyszka 2002, 45). Tyszka further categorizes these functions into biopsychic, economic, socio-normative, and socio-psychological.

F. Adamski (1984) classifies functions into two groups: institutional and personal, reflecting the social structure of the family, as well as parental and marital roles. In recent pedagogical literature, new typologies of family functions emerge, indicating deepened research and exploration of new dimensions of family functioning. S. Kawula (2007) identifies the biological-caregiving, cultural-social, economic, and educational functions. The diversity of typologies covering family functions reflects various research approaches, undoubtedly revealing the complex psychosocial contexts in which families operate and their range of responsibilities. Referring to the theoretical framework and scientific dimensions of family function typologies provides the foundation for further analysis of the topic. As indicated in the title, the focus is on describing the evolution of family functions across two distinct socio-political and cultural periods.

The functions of the family are intricately linked to its role in child development and the establishment of social order. These functions are seen as effective and socially significant to the extent that they promote the child's harmonious development. Within the family, specific attitudes are shaped, including parental attitudes, parent-child relationships, and the roles of mother and father—distinct yet shaped by tradition, customs, and social norms. Levels of identification with these roles, especially parental roles, vary. Additionally, a crisis in authority complicates the identification process, making it challenging for both parents and their children to find role models.

The evolution of the history of the family and its functions from the last thirty years is undertaken by T. Szlendak (2011). The author reveals three types of conflicts

that determine changes in the family structure. These are: uncertainty of paternity, differentiation of parental investments and different reproductive interests of the people constituting the family. Szlendak undertakes an analysis of the crisis of the modern family, its internal processes, which changes its previous functions

A. Kwak (2015) emphasizes that regardless of cultural changes, the family is still an important social issue, regardless of the changes taking place. It is not only privacy. Its social dimension and condition depend on reflection on the concept of family, the threat to building and functioning of the family, its meaning and determining whether it is still a value. Another reflection requires the aging of the society (Kwak 2015, 17-23).

The changing social capital of modern families is also one of the factors modifying their roles and functions. They result from migration and previous changes in the traditional family (Slany and Strzemecka 2016; Slany, Ślusarczyk and Pustułka 2017). Changes in the family include membership in it and membership, which results from the current social principles and rules as well as legal and moral criteria (Żurek 2015, 57-72).

Each era, along with its accompanying socio-cultural processes, mental shifts, and ideological changes, creates different contexts for the formation of parental roles and family functions. Societies, value systems, and sources of authority evolve, a phenomenon especially notable in contemporary pluralistic societies (Mariański 2020).

3. Polish People's Republic (prl) – a New Chapter in Post-War Poland: Childhood, Family, and Family Functions

The communist period in post-World War II Poland is characterized by specific social, political, and cultural contexts that shaped family conditions and education. The post-war years bore the legacy of wartime tragedies and losses, with substantial social implications for the nation's life and the formation of a new state steeped in an entirely different ideology. J. Kostkiewicz's (2020, 51-65) recent works tackle topics that, though seemingly historical, remain poignant and demand ongoing reflection. The fates of Polish children, their forced Germanization during WWII, and their subsequent displacement remain research subjects to this day, often documented in autobiographies disclosed years later in old age. These accounts reflect the issue of post-war orphanhood, highlighting the breakdown of traditional family models and family functions, which the communist state sought to replace after 1945. The ideologies of this period distorted traditional family functions and roles, substituting them with a state-controlled, regulated educational system. W. Theiss (2012, 2007, 2020), author of numerous publications on children, childhood, and families affected by camps and deportations, writes extensively on the wartime and post-war experiences of children and families. These children, impacted by orphanhood, lost the foundations for harmonious existence and the development of a stable identity.

R. Doniec (2017) conducted research on the relationship between quality of life and crises in the post-war period, exploring the child's fate and childhood amid Poland's post-war situation. She hypothesizes a link between family actions and the creation of childhood even under challenging conditions. Doniec poses key questions: "1) To what extent can a child's fate and childhood intertwine with the fate of the nation? and 2) How can family actions help a child build a safe and happy childhood under difficult socio-political and existential conditions?" (Doniec 2017, 222). She highlights the limited research in this area, especially regarding the period between the war and the Stalinist era (ibidem). In her research conclusions, Doniec outlines the wartime impacts that markedly influenced the post-war situation of Polish families. Childhood took two opposing forms regarding family pedagogical culture, interpersonal relationships, family connections to a repressive political system, and post-war economic conditions. On one hand, one could talk about an abandoned, wounded, isolated, and misunderstood childhood on the other, childhood could be shaped by rational and mature parenting (Doniec 2017, 238). Both forms shaped the experience of childhood, influencing its atmosphere, tone, and overall quality of life. According to Doniec, the child's fate in the post-war years was deeply entwined with family life and the nation's destiny, as memoirs have shown. The war shattered the material structure of the Polish home, wounding and weakening the family (and thus childhood), yet it did not destroy the sense of family unity (Doniec 2017, 238-239). The child became a subject of social life, marked by the ideology of the time, which, while not stripping childhood away, rendered it distinct. In a comparative view of childhood against its wartime context, the era of the Polish People's Republic (PRL)—despite its psychosocial consequences—became a landscape of "integration" into the PRL setting and its prevailing educational rituals. Independence and autonomy were at odds with the spirit of collectivism and social unity, while socio-historical knowledge had to conform to Marxist-Leninist doctrines (literature, periodicals).

Childhood itself does not change but rather forms anew—this time amid relative social stability, though not always in conditions of material prosperity. It is, however, always accompanied by a child's indomitable desire for life, joy, dreams, and imagination, often compensating for material shortages and low social status. Hardships frequently spark determination, fostering educational and professional aspirations that ultimately lead to self-development, self-discipline, and self-actualization. Generations of children from rural and working-class backgrounds in the PRL era built their own social status, with educational egalitarianism providing a gateway to social mobility through schooling, skill acquisition, and eventual employment. The transformation of the family at that time was marked by ongoing socio-cultural shifts, visible in attitudes, the shaping of a "new" worldview, and considerable cultural changes, especially among rural families migrating to cities. This migration significantly altered the lifestyles of children from rural backgrounds, catalysing shifts in customs, perspectives on tradition, intergenerational relationships, and the role of education in child development, as well as in long-term aspirations for children's futures. The structure of rural life also evolved, balancing tradition

and attachment to land with a search for new forms of "better lives" for children. Across the social landscape and family structures, regardless of background, new forms of parental care, notably single motherhood, emerged during this period. This new terminology introduced terms into public discourse, such as single mother, unwed mother, or expectant, single, and far from home" (Klich-Kluczewska 2015, 71-81), which stigmatized both mother and child. As Klich-Kluczewska (2015, 73) notes, "This typifies a view of social issues through the prism of the primary actors: young mothers of children from informal relationships. Defining these women as problematic is also the main reason for their presence in public media".

Researchers studying the period suggest that the 1960s communist government in Poland generated three types of conflicts: social conflict, authority conflict, and conscience conflict (Grzybowski 2012, 106-107). The social conflict aimed to recruit the younger generation of Poles into communist ideology, primarily through mechanisms of social advancement. The post-war material hardships and existential difficulties led many young people to submit to the prevailing ideology. As R. Grzybowski (2012, 107) notes, the authorities "utilized methods of 'social advancement, which involved shifting individuals within the social structure. In the conditions of the People's Republic of Poland, this often took the form of rural youth migrating to cities". The result of these changes was a loss of previous identity and separation from family (through study in different locations and residence in boarding schools), all in the name of political indoctrination, communist propaganda, and the ideological moulding of young people. The authority conflict involved changes to traditional personal, institutional, and ideological authorities. The state's monopolization of social space marginalized the Church as an institution and eroded the influence of personal authorities, such as priests, conservative educators, and sometimes even parents. These shifts altered values, worldviews, and axiological systems among children and youth, simultaneously reshaping their social and cultural needs.

The emphasis on collective life (children's and youth organizations) excluded individuality, originality, independence, and creativity, reducing the child to one among many within the collective. The totalitarian communist government stripped parents of their natural educational privileges. "The communist state aimed to deprive the family of its most important functions, including its educational role. The family home was to be relegated to a supporting role, aiding the socialist school in its educational pursuits. The totalitarian state, in turn, was to become the 'ideological parent' of the child" (Grzybowski 2012, 111-112). Consequently, the family was deprived of influence and educational agency. The cultural capital it possessed (Bourdieu and Passeron 2006) was either nullified, restricted, or necessarily concealed due to fears of indoctrination or persecution. This dynamic led to a double identity, limiting the child's socialization by aligning it with the requirements of the communist school. Parents were thus compelled to foster social and historical awareness while simultaneously ensuring their child's safety. Another approach was compliance and alignment with the prevailing doctrine.

4. Family Crisis in the Ppr Era and Their Socio-Cultural Contexts in Literature

Writing about the PRL era, above all, with respect to the life of a child, childhood contexts, and family functions, lacks clear-cut connotations. Yet, there is a certain coherence in these contexts, especially by the late 1980s, marking the onset of profound transformations and democratization. This period saw the emergence of the so-called "Generation 89", i.e. the cohort of children born in the 1960s and 1970s who were entering adulthood in 1989 (studying or beginning their careers). As M. Cobel-Tokarska (2015) points out, examining the literature and journalism of the period, the generation was labelled as the "Children of the Transition," "Generation '89," or even as people of success (ibidem). She emphasizes that "the late 1970s and early 1980s cohorts were labelled as 'Generation 2000', 'Children of the Free Market'; according to Wujec, they lack a shared generational experience because they lived through the most pivotal historical moments in kindergartens and elementary schools" (Cobel-Tokarska 2015, 128).

In the PRL era, family existence, its tasks, and functions were framed by state social policies. This period was also marked by familial pathologies, breakdowns, alcoholism, criminality, dysfunctional parental roles, violence, and single motherhood (Klich-Kluczewska 2015). As the primary site of child socialization, the family shaped the "quality" of childhood, its character, and atmosphere. Studies on the state of the family in the PRL era have a rich tradition in the social sciences, particularly in family sociology and pedagogy. Family research, including the situation of children during this period, was a focal point in family sociology. As B. Klich-Kluczewska (2015, 55) observes, this field became a unique phenomenon, interweaving "an unrealistic glorification of the Polish family as a socialist family, evident in many studies, particularly in the last two decades of the PRL, and, simultaneously, a rapid expansion in research on phenomena considered to deviate from family norms, categorized as 'family pathologies'". She describes this as a kind of schizophrenia, where "increasingly detailed studies on domestic violence and alcoholism were categorized as concerning pathological families, without significantly altering the general perception of the Polish family" (Klich-Kluczewska 2015, 56). Meanwhile, in pre-transformation pedagogy, numerous publications, including empirical studies, highlighted the significance of the family environment in child development (Ziemska 1969; Dyczewski 1981; Kocik 1976; Tyszka 1982) and addressed the situation of children in dysfunctional families, the necessity for rehabilitation measures, and institutionalized responses (Pytka 2008; Wilgocka-Okoń 1972; Skorny 1987; Ziemska 1969, 1975, 1979). The findings and analyses presented in these studies suggest that, in every era, regardless of its socio-cultural framework, each childhood, as a distinct and irreplaceable period of development and world exploration, is marked by unique characteristics, though common features remain. The family, as the primary educational environment, is invariably embedded in the social, political, and cultural realities of the time in which it exists.

5. Family in Modern Times. New Challenges or Crisis?

Typically, the period following 1989 is considered the onset of social changes that have led to the contemporary social phenomena. A. Radziewicz-Winnicki (2008) defines the years 1989-2007 as a time of substantial shifts across numerous domains. These changes encompass new challenges arising from the transformation: threats, shifts in the status of various social groups due to emerging economic structures, new research and analyses in social sciences and humanities, historical reinterpretations, legislative and publishing reforms, including in education. It is difficult to dispute the fact that these transformations had significant impacts on various social groups that had "grown" and "formed" under different ideologies and lifestyles, which, in turn, also imply new roles for the family and transformations in its functions. As S. Kawula (2007, 43) observed, "the costs of Polish transformation are borne primarily by the poorest, the helpless, the poorly educated, people with disabilities, those chronically ill, and their families". Social and educational practices during the period operated within new frameworks, which drove continuous transformations and the adoption of new axiologies, postmodern patterns, and models of social behaviour. The paradigm and scope of research on children and childhood also underwent, and continue to undergo, significant change. As B. Smolińska-Theiss (2010) emphasizes, social change is closely tied to individual development. New paradigms of childhood place scientific discourse within socio-cultural contexts, removing the child from traditional supervision and authoritarian parenting. The perception of the traditional family is evolving. Families are increasingly shifting towards cohabitation and same-sex partnerships. These changes stem from the European Parliament's work on the contemporary family model and the redefinition of marriage and family (Gierycz 2015). Moving away from monogamous, tradition-sanctioning, and parental responsibility-oriented families is becoming a nearly desirable trend. So-called patchwork and nuclear families exhibit a departure from traditional family functions, eliminating multigenerational connections, identity transmission, and previously established parental roles. The patchwork structure of families disrupts the traditional family unit's cohesion and roles, favouring the tolerance of a "mixed" structure, comprising diverse identity and worldview foundations, without the unity conferred by biological and community sanction. Research shows that in such families, "children reveal difficulties in defining the external boundaries of the family, often experiencing loyalty conflicts toward the biological parent, who is often outside the daily system" (Skarbek and Kierzkowska 2023, 55). Nuclear families are characterized by a radical shift in traditional family functions, including the replacement of the caregiving function with a consumer-oriented one. The concept of parentification (Chojnacka 2018) has also emerged, describing the transfer of caregiving roles to older siblings (Schier 2014) as a consequence of parental incapacity and a dysfunctional family system. This phenomenon constitutes a form of emotional abuse and a simultaneous loss of the

essence of childhood. This type of family is marked by weak emotional bonds and a pattern of "living alongside each other" rather than "living together," leading to dysfunctional forms of family relationships.

From the sociological perspective represented by T. Szlendak (2008), the crisis of the contemporary family and its different social perception results from individualization. "The family within the first modernity was shaped by the state and industry. A 'normal family' (i.e. a nuclear family) was formed then, from which the derogations were labelled as deviations or even pathologies" (Szlendak 2008, 37). Currently, according to the author, the family is the result of changes that are: globalization, individualization, risk management and blurring the division between nature and culture Nowadays, different forms of families acquire the same rights. Thus, the perception of these changes in the conditions of the crisis is a confirmation of the ultra-conservative position by researchers (ibidem).

The dynamics of social transformation drive an ongoing shift in both the role and structure of the family. According to CBOS, "socio-cultural changes in marital and family life, related to, amongst other things, rising divorce rates, delaying or foregoing marriage and procreation, a significant increase in informal relationships, and the growing proportion of children born in such unions, inevitably lead to a redefinition of the concept of family" (Komunikat z badań CBOS 2019, 5). The majority of respondents (99%) consider a married couple with children as a family. Analysis also shows that "a vast majority (91%) recognize a single mother or father raising at least one child as a family. It is also widely believed that people in informal relationships raising children together constitute a family (83% of responses). Over three-quarters (78%) regard an informal couple co-raising children from previous relationships as a family, while two-thirds (65%) classify a childless married couple as a family" (Komunikat z Badań CBOS 2019, 5-6). Interestingly, 31% of respondents consider a childless informal couple to be a family, while 65% define a childless marriage as such (compared to 71% in 2013). Only (or perhaps significantly) 23% recognize a same-sex couple (gay or lesbian) jointly raising a child as a family (up from 9% in 2006), while 13% recognize a childless same-sex couple as a family (up from 6% in 2006). Researchers note that "changes over time suggest an increasingly broad understanding of the term 'family.' Opinions recognizing informal relationships with children as families are steadily increasing, as is the recognition of the 'patchwork' model, where individuals in informal relationships raise children from previous unions together" (Komunikat z badań CBOS 2019, 6-7). These findings indicate an ongoing redefinition of the family. With shifts in the conceptual framework surrounding family, it becomes essential to consider: who is the child in today's family, and what functions does the family fulfil at present?

Modern families, while fulfilling their procreative functions, do not always link these to a sense of responsibility for passing on life. Sometimes, even within marriage, procreation is excluded in favour of a child-free model focused on career advancement. The family's educational functions include caregiving, emotional

support, instruction, and creative activation "Every family creates its own cultural environment, providing behaviour patterns, ways of spending leisure time, and evaluations of various social phenomena. It should establish a sense of security, inner balance, calm, and trust" (Nogowski 2015, 161-162). However, today, there are significant issues stemming from the absence of security in families. This void often leads children and adolescents to seek alternative forms of entertainment, which can manifest in pathological behaviours (hikikomori syndrome, sects, criminal subcultures, and internet addiction, known as webaholism). Non-normative and risky behaviours are increasingly common, as highlighted by M. Jędrzejko (2015). These include "drug experimentation, early sexual initiation and underage sex, cyber disorders, consumption of stimulants, gambling, non-medical drug use, e-cigarettes, prostitution, pornography, homosexuality, and sexual deviations" (Jędrzejko 2015, 34). Depression, rising rates of attempted suicides, and actual suicides among children and adolescents pose a major concern. According to research cited by the Demagog Foundation in 2022, "suicide attempts among the youngest are 2.5 times more frequent than in 2020. In 2022 alone, 2,093 people under the age of 18 attempted suicide, including 85 children younger than 13" (Samobójstwa 2023). This raises questions about the underlying functions of the contemporary family and the child's sense of security in a world full of opportunities that the PRL system did not offer. The pervasive lack of life purpose in a world dominated by consumption, despite the more attractive leisure options, improved living conditions, and better education and knowledge sources compared to the past, points to negative shifts in the family's roles and functions. These observations confirm A. Maslow's thesis that motivation to act stems from unmet fundamental needs: safety, belonging, love, and respect (Maslow 2009, 62-76).

6. Child and Family – Social and Cultural Context

"Observing the various changes in the modern world, it is impossible to ignore how the family has shifted from a traditional model rooted in religious and moral values, with the father's authority at its core, to a democratic model that abandons traditional-religious values, lacking a stable moral structure to guarantee familial and societal stability and functionality," writes J.M. Nogowski (2015, 170). The hallmark of today's family is an increasing trend toward individualization, which displaces the communal nature, shared responsibility, and mutual concern for children that traditionally defined family life. The family now often functions as a flexible, mobile structure, subject to fluctuations largely influenced by Western cultural patterns. This emancipation of the family carries with it many negative phenomena, leading to a patchwork family character, frequent partner changes, divorces, and their socio-emotional impacts (Brągiel 1999; Izdebska 2004; Matyjas 2017). Cohabitation, as an alternative to traditional family structures, along with other community-based partnerships built on consensual principles, create new family and systemic realities. Sometimes these take on a hybrid form, where the

economic function predominates, often without appropriate educational role models. Examples include families or other partnerships "living apart" (Kawula 2006). Each of these forms has specific consequences for a child's development and socialization. Children may become bargaining chips in the pursuit of social benefits, suffer from a lack of care due to parental economic migration, experience "Euro-orphanhood," or find themselves caught in identity conflicts within multicultural relationships (Sowa-Bethane 2019; Szczurek-Boruta 2023). Kawula (2006, 7) also notes the shifts in "the parental roles of women and men, raising questions about the extent to which contemporary family functioning is connected to these changing gender roles". These evolving parental roles alter the traditional family landscape, often placing the mother outside the bounds of home-cantered care and, in some cases, positioning her as the "head of the household," frequently due to economic migration. Transnational parenting is one manifestation of these cultural changes within the modern family, though not without its consequences. "Parental economic migration disrupts the family's fundamental functions. The absence of one parent upsets interpersonal relationships within the family and alters the ways in which social and family roles are played by its members" (Skoczyńska-Prokopowicz 2015, 171). This leads to child loneliness, not only as a result of economic migration but also due to parents' excessive professional engagement. The internet becomes a compensatory social environment, providing the interpersonal interactions that parents do not develop. Global culture imposes new behaviour patterns on children, often putting them in conflict with their parents. Parental and child expectations become increasingly unmet, deepening the deprivation of parental roles. "The family can also become a threat to its members when it too easily succumbs to external influences and trends, relinquishing traditional values and norms and accepting everything brought by global culture. In a passive, adaptive stance, it adopts many aspects of mass and commercial culture" (Skoczyńska-Prokopowicz 2013, 37). The globalization of culture leads to identity changes and new value systems within the family, ultimately deconstructing its functions. These changes do not always strengthen family bonds or support the effective fulfilment of parental roles.

Conclusions

Presenting two eras, and thus two different socio-cultural contexts, with a focus on the perspectives of the child, childhood, family, and its functions, offers only a narrow cross-section of the topic. This study serves neither as a critique nor an endorsement of any of these periods. Its purpose is to highlight differences arising from vastly different political and socio-cultural conditions, while also bringing to light the threats and crises affecting children and families. Each historical period has its own unique characteristics, achievements, and shortcomings. Believing in the superiority and accomplishments of our civilization may be overly optimistic. Technological progress is not equivalent to the growth of human awareness

or responsibility toward future generations. The crisis of the modern family has become a consequence of neglecting its functions, which are sine qua non conditions for the child's harmonious development and the family's social value in its traditional sense. A safe and happy childhood is not a function of economic wealth, family social status, or cultural emancipation. Nor is it entirely dependent on the political system, as long as it is characterized by care for the child's safety and optimal material conditions. Unquestionably, the core criterion is relationships based on love, care, respect, and responsibility within the family, irrespective of external circumstances.

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