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FAMILY AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION EMPLOYEES. A SOCIOLOGICAL DIAGNOSIS 2015

Abstract

In 2015, a research team of the Polish Measurement of Attitudes and Values carried out a representative survey of public administration employees. There were 746 survey participants who represented public administration entities from 16 voivodships in Poland, varied in terms of the most important sociodemographic features. The data were collected by means of the CAWI technique in the variant of direct contact with the respondent, with the computer record of responses in the form of an electronic self-returnable questionnaire.

Keywords: measurement, survey, family, family life

Abstrakt

W 2015 roku zespół badawczy Polskiego Pomiaru Postaw i Wartości przeprowadził reprezentatywne badanie pracowników administracji publicznej. W badaniu wzięło udział 746 respondentów, reprezentujących podmioty administracji publicznej z 16 województw w kraju, zróżnicowanych pod względem najważniejszych cech społeczno demograficznych. Dane zgromadzono za pomocą techniki CAWI w wariancie bezpośredniego kontaktu z respondentem, przy komputerowym zapisie wskazań w postaci elektronicznej ankiety samowrotnej.

Słowa kluczowe: pomiar, badanie, rodzina, życie rodzinne

Introduction

Family as a group provides its members with the sense of community and kinship, as well as suitable conditions for development. It is in family that we can learn marital and parental roles, and with our attitudes we prepare successive members to perform specific social roles. In addition to marital and family roles, adult citizens should also fulfil professional roles being an effect of their activity on the labour market. Marital, family and professional life is a dynamic process, developing and encountering new difficulties, and the life we live is a set of experiences. The presented research findings aim at collating these three vital roles and giving an answer to the question whether in the contemporary world these roles combine and complement or rather exclude and limit one another or rather.

Family and professional roles of the contemporary family

The notion of a social role is related to a social position, and the latter places man in society. The social role has a dual connection with the position where, on the one hand, it is regarded to be a set of rights and obligations arising from a given position, and on the other hand it is a scenario of the position, determining the pattern of attitudes. Individual positions may be occupied simultaneously or subsequently in one's life. Thus, one can be at the same time a husband, a father, an office worker, and then a grandfather or a Senior Club member. Knowing the social position of a person we can predict and expect from him or her specific behaviours arising from the adaptation to the rules of his or her role. The reality shows, however, that individuals fulfil their roles to a different extent, and it even happens that they do not fulfil them at all [Sztompka, 2010: 92–94].

The transformations that the contemporary family experiences concern its structure, composition and the relations among family members. The contemporary model of family is based on partnership by virtue of which a mother-wife takes over a considerable part of power. It is connected with a substantial increase in the employment of women, which translates into the growth of their economic independence. A professionally active wife and a professionally active husband jointly engage in the family life and share duties. Not only do spouses have equal rights but also duties, therefore, the traditional views of the role of a husband as the head of the family are becoming invalid [Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, 2004: 13].

Thus, undertaking jobs outside home by women has contributed to the fuller and more frequent commitment of men to family life. The consequence of those changes was the emergence of such terms in literature as partnership-based marriage, companionate marriage or partnership-based relationships. The changes family is experiencing to a great extent concern the role of man in family, assuming that he still performs the role of the breadwinner, and the professionally working woman is primarily responsible for providing childcare. The husband's contribution to the performance of household duties in that period is still smaller than the wife's contribution, but the psychological proximity between spouses and between parents and children becomes significant [Kwak, 2005: 17–18].

It also turned out that the professional role of the man influences his participation in the family life. The pursue of the maximisation of income and improvement of qualifications enforces serious commitment of an employee to the job performed. Unfortunately, such a system limits the family life. Although the man's high income and professional position guarantee him a high level of success as a breadwinner, but then the professional role competes with the family one. Hence, a conflict between professional career and family life occurs [Elliot, 1986: 85–86]. The conflict was initially assigned to the father – employee role but with years it turned out equally important in the case of women.

The contemporary family of the 21st century is the consolidation of the model in which both spouses work and the realisation of marital (parental) and professional roles is implemented according to specific patterns. Spouses may share duties by interests and talents, they can also modify their roles through the division of tasks. We can also come across taking over parental roles by third parties (baby-sitters, nannies) or specialised institutions (nurseries, kindergartens). The least desirable model for family is when one frees oneself from the roles by changing requirements to parental or professional tasks [Kwak, Wolfe, 2001: 154].

The attitudes of public administration employees – the selection of data with a commentary

Keeping the right proportions between professional work and work for family, including childcare provision, is a significant problem both for women and men. Thus, it has become necessary to balance gender roles in family, which consists in the division of work in the household and in all the spheres of common life. The division of housework and defining roles in family requires compromises and understanding the needs of all family members. Thus, it is worth answering the question whether working women and working men define the division of duties in the same way, whether they are equally aware of their commitment to family life, and whether they actually divide the duties equally when they both work professionally.

The empirical deliberations about family started with the question about partnership in family and the division of family duties. Both were strongly supported by 76.4% of respondents, and 22.9% somewhat agreed with it. Partnership in relationship and sharing duties are important both to women and men, 99.6% of whom strongly and somewhat agreed with such a statement. That viewpoint was shared both by married people, 77.8% of whom strongly agreed and 21.9% who somewhat agreed, and by those living in common-law relationships, 84.6% and 15.4%, respectively.

70.0% of chief specialists were strongly in favour of partnership in family, and the same opinion was shared by 85.7% of clerks. For the remaining categories of the positions of public administration employees the frequency of responses strongly supporting partnership was at the level of 76.0% – 78.9%. Education did not significantly differentiate respondents generally declaring partnership, some differences, however, can be seen in opinions strongly supporting such a model. Respondents with bachelor's and engineer's degrees supported partnership most strongly, in 100%. In comparison, people with post-secondary education constituted 72.2% of frequency.

The age of respondents indicates that people aged 25–34 are the strongest supporters of partnership in the family (88.3%), that is, in accordance with the demographic trends, these are those who have only

begun their family and marital life or common-law partnership. The other group which is aware of the division of duties seem to be people who express such a view based on their own experience, aged 55–64, among whom strong agreement was expressed by 84.4%. Neither the size of the place in which a given institution is situated, nor the type of the entity in which the respondents are employed influenced significantly the diversity of attitudes towards partnership in family.

Partnership in relationship, expressed in the division of duties, should have beneficial impact on the creation of the proper balance between professional career and family life. This balance was also the subject of the empirical material analysis from which it results that too long working hours limited respondents in the suitable performance of family duties with most frequent indication to a few times a year (34.6%) and a few times a month (27.6%). Much bigger difficulties in the reconciliation of professional activity and family duties were indicated by males. Too much time devoted to work prevented them from being active in their family life, with the frequency amounting to a few times a year for 36.4% of respondents, a few times a month for 31.3% and a few times a week for 17.3%. Among females, 33.7% experienced such difficulties a few times a year, 25.6% – a few times a month, and 12.1% a few times a week. Thus, women seem to manage to keep the proper balance a little better, which is also confirmed by the fact that 25.6% never experienced such problems, and in the case of men this frequency was only 12.9%.

Considering the stand taken, it turned out that specialists form a group experiencing the excess of work the most, and, in consequence, the problems with the fulfilment of family duties. In this group, such difficulties occurred a few times a year in 41.4% of cases, and a few times a month in 27.6% of cases. Nervous atmosphere at home as an effect of stress in the workplace was most experienced by people at the position of a director or a deputy director. 42.1% of respondents experienced it a few times a month and 32.2% – a few times a year. What is also alarming is the high percentage of people on that position (as many as 19%) who experience such a situation a few times a week. The representatives of the specialist position seem to be the least stressed group at work, 23.0% of them never experienced nervous atmosphere at home which would be caused by stress at work.

Commitment to professional work is typical for people being at the age when professional activity is predominant, therefore, respondents aged 35–44 and 45–54. Due to the excess of work, respondents had problems with the fulfilment of family duties a few times a week, 29.2% and 22.1%, respectively. Most seldom such problems were encountered by the representatives of the youngest and the oldest groups of respondents. In the case of survey participants aged 25–34, 35.0% never experienced such a situation, and there were 27.3% of such respondents at the age of 65 +. What is more, employees aged 35–44 and 45–55 were also worst at handling stress at work, which translated into nervous atmosphere at home. 18.8% and 19.5%, respectively, experienced such a situation a few times a week, and 29.2% and 22.1% – a few times a month. Among the representatives of those age groups, also the lowest frequencies (8.2% and 6.5%) of statements that they never experienced such a situation were noted.

Contemporary parenthood in the empirical analysis

Parenthood manifests itself in performing specific parental roles, namely the role of a mother and a father, consisting in the creation of relations between a mother and a child, between a father and a child, and even among siblings. It is a kind of responsibility which emerges at the child's birth and lasts till the end of one's life. Most often parenting roles are fulfilled in adult life, and being a parent is characterised by the continuity of duration and irreversibility, as these roles cannot be put off in time or suspended. Parents have specific tasks to perform toward their child, but primarily they are responsible for satisfying basic and higher needs. Parenting is also connected with upbringing and preparing the child to living in society, in accordance with the contemporary norms, and enabling him or her personal development and self-realisation [Kwak, 2008: 22–27].

The changes we are observing with respect to defining parenthood also concern the essence of the significance of child in family. In the traditional family a child was perceived in the category of labour force, the permanence of family, and care for the old age. Families with children enjoyed greater social acceptance, because an adequate number of children ensured the continuity of generations of a given society and its culture. Moreover, it should be emphasised that a prevailing model at that time was the one in which children obeyed their parents, especially father performing the role of head of the family [Kwak, 2012: 23].

The transformation of the parental roles has been considerably influenced by the development of women's professional activity which contributed to the abolishment of patriarchal power. The consolidation of the partnership-based family model also brought about the emergence of partnership-based parenting, which expresses itself in the division of household duties and raising children. Contemporary fathers differ significantly in providing childcare from parenting practices of their fathers and grandfathers. In the literature of the subject, it is even assumed that since women have worked professionally we have a new type of motherhood and fatherhood and parents' job and childcare satisfaction depends on the division of duties in the household [Szlendak, 2012: 432–450].

Questions concerning parenthood were also directed to public administration employees a great majority of whom, 46.1%, did not agree with the statement that parents should sacrifice everything for children. It should be emphasised that 21.3% of respondents had no opinion about that, and only 6.3% strongly agreed with it. On the other hand, we expect unconditional love and respect from children, which is confirmed by 81.9% of "I strongly agree" and "I somewhat agree" responses. We also expect that in the future our children will take care of their elderly parents, which is confirmed by 84.4% support for such an opinion. We willingly pass on the principles of the religion we practice to children, 70.1% of supportive responses, and we believe that established family values will protect our family against dysfunction and dangers, as many as 87.9% of respondents agree and strongly agree with this statement. Moreover, the issues related to the style of upbringing children turned out to be important to respondents, particularly strong negation (71.5%) of raising children in full democracy (freely, without any limitations).

Women and men a bit differently define parenthood and obligations arising from it. The research findings prove that the era of the woman staying at home and sacrificing only for children is replaced by professionally active women who more often than men do not agree for such sacrifices. Among women, as many as 47.0% did not agree with such a statement, with the lack of men's acceptance at the level of 27.6%. Women who accepted such an attitude towards parenthood were also in minority in comparison with men accepting such an attitude, 22.0% to 33.1%, respectively. However, bigger agreement between sexes was present in the case of the expectations of love and respect children should bestow on parents. Men in 52.2% agreed and in 30.9% strongly agreed with such behaviour, and among women there were respectively 48.9% and 32.6% of such positive responses. Women and men also agree that children should feel obliged to provide care to their aging parents. In this respect, 53.0% of women and 55.5% of men chose the option "I somewhat agree" and 28.8% and 33.5%, respectively, gave the response "I strongly agree".

Parenting is connected with a lot of responsibility for upbringing next generations, and one of the obligations is to pass on the principles of the pronounced religion to children. Women are a little more convinced about that. They were strongly in favour in 23.9%, and somewhat in favour in 50.0%. Men more often than women avoided an answer to this question, obtaining respectively 21.0% to 16.3%, and there were 22.1% strongly supporting and 41.2% somewhat supporting the necessity to pass on the principles of the pronounced religion to children. However, the responses concerning the conviction that the values established in family can protect them against dangers and dysfunctions distributed reversely. Here, such an opinion was firmly supported by men who somewhat agreed with it in 65.1% and strongly supported it in 28.7%. The distribution of scores among women was 47.2% for agreeing somewhat with this statement and 37.3% for agreeing strongly. What is also significant for the analysis is the question about the democratic style of child upbringing. In this case, neither women nor men are the supporters of raising children without any limitations. As many as 51.7% of women and 43.0% of men were rather against such a form of upbringing, and 22.2% and 24.3%, respectively, were strongly against.

When analysing parental attitudes, it seems important to differentiate respondents in terms of age and marital status, owing to which we may become acquainted with the attitudes of those who have not experienced parenting yet and those who express their opinions from the perspective of their age and life experiences. Single people were most strongly against sacrificing everything for children, including 48.8% of those who were somewhat against and 6.3% who were strongly against. Strong negation of this attitude was also visible in the attitudes of married respondents who in 38.2% somewhat disagreed and 7.3% strongly disagreed, which proves that the contemporary parenting does not mean resignation from one's own life to the benefit of sacrificing everything for children. Those attitudes were also reflected in the assessment of democratic (free, without any limitations) upbringing of children, with which almost all respondents of various ages disagreed, and the level of scores here ranged from 43.8% for the youngest respondents

aged 24–34, up to 54.5% for people aged 64 and more. The respondent group was strongly concordant in the opinion that the consolidated family values protect family against dysfunction and dangers. Both older and younger respondents, unmarried and married ones, strongly and somewhat agreed with it, but the strongest conviction occurred among unmarried people, 88.8% of the total responses, and this proves strong attachment to family values.

In addition to the attachment to family values there is a strong belief among respondents about the necessity to pass on to children the principles of the religion they pronounce. Married people are most strongly convinced about it, and 48.3% of them somewhat agree and 26.0% strongly agree. Such a strong belief is at the same time most typical for respondents aged 35–44 and 45–54 for whom the level of “I somewhat agree” responses was 44.8% and 48.1%, respectively, and “I strongly agree” – 26.0% in each group. Moreover, the representatives of public administration firmly believe that parents should be unconditionally loved and respected, and there is agreement about that both among younger respondents, aged 24–34, of whom 33.3% strongly agreed and 46.7% somewhat agreed, and among older respondents, aged 55–64, for whom the level of positive responses was 47.9% and 50.0%, respectively. Unmarried respondents were most strongly convinced about love to parents and showing them respect, strongly agreeing in 30.0% and somewhat agreeing in 51.3%, which is another proof for strong family values established in children's attitudes.

Contemporary parenting, as it turns out, is not only giving oneself to children but also expecting something in return. As it already results from the presented data, the expectations concern love and respect that parents should be given, but respondents were also asked about providing care to aging parents. The belief that this obligation lies on children is present both among single people, where there were 81.3% of positive responses in total, in the group of the youngest respondents aged 24–34 on the level of 88.4%, and among older survey participants, represented by widowers (84.4%). These declarative attitudes should be regarded another important family value and the manifestation of responsible parenting, still expressing itself in teaching responsibility not only for oneself but also for relatives. There is only one question left – whether those busy younger and older children will be able to fulfil this obligation in future.

Conclusions

Responsibility for family and conscious parenting are important values in the lives of public administration employees. The combination and proper fulfilment of the professional, marital and family roles bring about some difficulties which, to a greater or lesser extent, were overcome by the survey respondents. Obviously, the performance of professional and family roles is facilitated by the partnership-based family model, preferred among respondents. In the case of respondents, the balance between professional and family life is conditioned by the amount of time devoted to work and the amount of stress it causes. In the analysis of parenthood, there is firm negation of the traditional model in which parents (mother in particular) sacrifice for children. In such parenthood there is no place for democratic upbringing of children, and what is more, children are still expected to show respect and love, and even provide care for the old age. We also observe a strong belief in the necessity to consolidate family values which will protect family against dysfunction and dangers. Great significance is attributed to religion which, according to respondents, should be passed on to the next generations.

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