

Department of Welfare Pedagogy and Social Work
in the Pedagogy and Psychology Institute
in the Wszechnica Świętokrzyska in Kielce

BOŻENA MATYJAS

Social threats to a contemporary Polish family

Spoleczne zagrożenia funkcjonowania współczesnej rodziny polskiej

At the beginning of the 90-s of the 20th century a Polish family was subject to sudden changes which occurred in a difficult domestic and international situation – both economic and political ones. At the beginning of the transformation there was an escalation of negative factors which had been present in the Poles' life from the end of the 80-s. The feeling of safe future was drastically reduced, there was a pressure related to the fear of job loss, and actual job loss, as well as to the inability to provide a proper life start for children (Z. Tyszyńska 2001, p. 28).

Unemployment became one of crucial social issues responsible for the exclusion of individuals, families or whole social and occupational groups. It resulted in extreme poverty which in turn constitutes a serious threat to a contemporary Polish family. In the families suffering unemployment a dole for the unemployed becomes the only source of income. Its real material value is highly insufficient in comparison to cost of living (D. Graniewska 2001, p. 14). State doles for the unemployed usually lower families' living standards. Research carried out by A. Bańka (1992, p.22) confirms that unemployment brings no benefits. Quite to the contrary, financial income of a family in which a breadwinner has become unemployed is reduced significantly. The result of this is twofold: a psychological and a material one. The former one comprises independence and freedom restraints. They both include strict restrictions as far as family money and expenditures are concerned. There is a need to put quantity and quality restrictions on food and clothes purchase as well as the way leisure time is spent because it all suddenly becomes simply too expensive.

According to H. Marzec (1999, p.117-179) in Polish families suffering unemployment there is a tendency to spend less money on food. These expenditures equal on average 50% of a monthly income of a family. On the second place there are expenditures related to accommodation, rent, gas, and energy. Only 4.8% of monthly income is spent on personal hygiene and health protection. 5.5% of a monthly income is spent on clothes (often second-hand clothes). Expenditures on leisure time activities are not included in the family budget or they are just a slight percentage of the income and only in the families with higher and secondary education. Parents and children do not use complementary upbringing centres because they would have to pay for it. Only 4.25% of them take part in classes organised in different centres. Foreign languages learning and playing musical instruments are the most popular activities. Plans of rest and recreation are significantly reduced or even dropped. In the situation when financial income does not allow to use leisure time offers and entertainment it is the family that is responsible for providing leisure time activities for children and

teenagers. The most frequent solution is taking children to grandparents who usually live in the country. Over 94% of the respondents described spending leisure time beyond their place of living as unattainable. When families consider priorities among their needs each time they face a dilemma. It is known that certain needs are satisfied at the cost of other ones. While setting the priorities parents usually resign from their own needs in order to satisfy their children's needs. Despite the fact that even the children's needs are satisfied in a minimal way parents care about higher needs such as: the need to rest, recreate, use cultural heritage. Life without a theatre, cinema, reading a book or a magazine or going to the sea-side is possible, while one cannot live without eating. Therefore, primary needs become crucial to satisfy in families suffering unemployment although sometimes income is too low even for them. The necessity to cut expenditures on food caused the phenomenon of malnutrition in many families. Research by M. Szyłko-Skoczny (1994, p. 67) confirms this relation. In 1992 teachers from Sanok started to observe that pupils come to school hungry. Some of the children admitted that they ate only once per day. A fifteen-year-old boy from Wisłok dreamt about eating so much before going to bed as not to think about food while falling asleep. This is one of the extreme examples of hunger. And yet proper nutrition and clothes appropriate to the season are very important factors determining development and health of children.

As it is seen many things are dependent on a financial situation of the family because it sets standards of living, allows creating unnecessary conditions for proper biological, sociological and cultural development. Restrictions of material security of a family influence in a strong and negative way its welfare and educational function. An unemployed family experiences numerous problems among which a poor financial situation is a dominant one. Parents in such families focus rather on what should be done in order to satisfy children's material needs, however, they do not pay much attention to their own behaviour, to what they represent. Sometimes they do not realise what the results of such behaviour can be. When they focus on their own situation, full of sorrows and resentment, they can pass on a distorted vision of the surrounding world to their children. What is the family experience of a child from an unemployed family? Parents should pay attention to being objective, so that the child could really follow their example, so that the identification was beneficial and helpful to the child particularly at school (M. Kotomska 2000, p. 69).

Unemployment distorts also emotional and expressive function of a family. In order to satisfy such needs as: safety, love, affiliation, self-fulfillment, interpersonal contact, and others it is necessary to provide a proper family structure and atmosphere. Numerous surveys carried out in Poland about unemployment confirm that, unfortunately, parents' unemployment increases the occurrence of conflict situations (B. Matyjas 2003). Very often arguments in a family are caused by the inability to meet children's consumer expectations which are created by contemporary media.

To sum up: unemployment in a simple and visible way distorts the fulfillment of basic for the proper development of a child family function. So much is dependent on financial means. They are necessary to help a child to provide proper living conditions, food, clothes as well as access to different form of cultural heritage. The loss of job by one of the parents significantly deteriorates financial situation. Moreover, unfavourable atmosphere in a family threatens a social adaptation of a child. Stress and conflicts do not reinforce positive upbringing. Although the research show that such a situation occurs mainly in families with a low level of education, all these factors distort basic functions of a family.

Another factor (apart from unemployment) which threatens the proper functioning of a family is poverty. According to S. Katula (2002, p.7-8) its causes are the following:

1. Unemployment – from among 3 mln of the registered unemployed 80% have no right to a dole and 40% have had no job for over 2 years.

2. Reduction of migration from rural areas to cities – after workers' hotels were closed there is no place in cities to stay in order to look for a job or to work. In rural areas there are still fewer and fewer jobs, however, there are still more and more children.
3. Having many children – even if the monthly salary of one of the parents is higher than average, the family (2+5) to live below the minimum social level. Over 70% of families with many children live in poverty, 50% live in the rural areas.
4. Disease – there are 4.5 mln handicapped people in Poland and many people chronically ill. The majority of services are not free of charge. Often a disease in a family means a financial disaster of the whole family.
5. Low level of education – 38% of Poles have only primary or secondary education. The rest (62%) has problems with the new labour market.

The opinion poll shows that the richest Poles point to laziness, helplessness, and alcoholism as to the reasons of poverty. The poor, on the other hand, claim that unemployment, low pensions, diseases and physical disability are the cause of poverty.

The above mentioned factors threatening the proper functioning of a family are interesting for many scholars: psychologists, sociologists, physicians, educators.

Social educators, who I represent, are interested in two ways which distance people's biographies, their ambitions, life plans. These ways block promotion and lower living conditions of certain groups, regions or/and countries unable to develop on their own which also undergo negative, selective processes. It is the way and the mechanism of social, group and individual exclusion – also though the education system (Z. Kwieciński 2002) as well as the way and the mechanism of biological, social and cultural marginalization of individuals or human groups and regions. There are different helpful models being worked out, fields and support measures are being described, there are numerous activities which aim at activating local communities. Unfortunately, their efficacy is not satisfactory.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Graniewska D.: Rodzina a bezrobocie – sytuacja w Polsce. „Problemy Rodziny” 2001. Nr 3
2. Kawula S.: Pomocniczość i wsparcie. Kategorie pedagogiki społecznej. Wyd. „Kastalia”. Olsztyn 2002
3. Kotomska M.: Sytuacja dziecka w rodzinie bezrobotnej zamieszkałej na terenie miasta Kielce. „Praca Socjalna” 2000. Nr 1
4. Kwieciński Z.: Wykluczanie. Toruń 2002
5. Marzec H.: Funkcje opiekuńczo-wychowawcze rodzin bezrobotnych. Piotrków Trybunalski 1999
6. Matyjas B.: Dzieciństwo w rodzinie bezrobotnych w środowisku małego miasta. Kielce 2003
7. Szyłko-Skoczny M.: Pomoc społeczna wobec zjawiska bezrobocia. Warszawa 1994
8. Tyszką Z.: Relacja „rodzina – społeczeństwo globalne” w okresie transformacji (w): Rodzina współczesna. Red. M. Ziemska. Warszawa 2001

ABSTRACT

Among factors which threaten a contemporary family are the following: unemployment, scaling back migration from rural areas to cities, having many children, diseases, and a low level of education. From a psychological point of view unemployment is a very important threat as it leads to material poverty, worsening of family living conditions (especially chil-

dren). It is also a factor which determines social grouping and exclusion of individuals, groups (families) or whole local communities.

STRESZCZENIE

Wśród czynników zagrażających funkcjonowaniu współczesnej rodziny należy wymienić: bezrobocie, zatrzymanie migracji ze wsi do miast, wielodzietność, choroby, za niski poziom edukacji. Dla pedagogów bardzo ważnym zagrożeniem jest bezrobocie, które prowadzi często do ubóstwa materialnego, pogorszenia warunków życia całej rodziny (zwłaszcza dzieci). Jest także czynnikiem powodującym marginalizację i wykluczanie jednostek, grup (rodzin) lub całych społeczności lokalnych.